

INTRODUCTION

Like our own, the world of **Aberrant** is not static. It does not stand still long enough for you to get a good look at it, to become overly familiar. It flutters and lunges, murders and creates. **Aberrant** is not a comic strip wherein the protagonist fights the same three villains over and over and over again, that strip where the villain makes the same stupid mistake that got his ass kicked the last time. The law of cause and effect applies. Criminals learn their lessons. Heroes get cocky and fall. The **Aberrant** setting has demographics and trends and viewer response figures very similar to our own. The world and the signature characters learn, grow and evolve (or degenerate, as the case may be).

In 1998, the appearance of novas inflicted a riot of changes on the face of the world. Ten years later, it is a cleaner and more hopeful world than our own. The air smells better. The water carries fewer toxic contaminants. AIDS has ceased to be a concern. A larger portion of the world's population goes to bed with a warm meal in their bellies than has ever before been the case. All of these things have come to pass with the assistance of novas. *Homo sapiens novus* fixed many of the mistakes of *H. sapiens sapiens*. In return, baselines revere novas. They watch their exploits on *N!*, follow the law-enforcement efforts of Team Tomorrow in the newspaper and watch XWF battles on the OpNet. For 10 years, a state of benevolent symbiosis existed between baseline and nova.

The Golden Age of novas reached its peak in 2008, just before the murder of Jennifer "Slider" Landers. It is her death that begins the relentless downward spiral that slowly pulls the nova-driven global Camelot toward the tragedy and devastation of the Aberrant War (for more on the Aberrant War, see **Trinity**, which takes place in the same universe — or is it just a very similar universe? — but over a century later). **Aberrants Worldwide: Phase I** details the more spectacular events of 2008–2010 and allows characters to be a part of those events that will become history.

The scenarios in **Aberrants Worldwide: Phase I** are not classic super-battles, though some of them can be slanted that way if it better suits your style of play. All of the situations presented in this book are opportunities for political, social, investigative and ideological roleplaying, but if you're more interested in rolling dice

and kicking ass, the material in this book can be adapted to allow for that kind of interaction as well.

The four scenarios in **Phase I** extend the **Aberrant** timeline up through 2010 and reveal some of the machinations of the various factions of the **Aberrant** world, from the relatively mundane scheming of the American Eagle Party to the more ambitious power plays of the Teragen and Project Utopia.

In **Strange Bedfellows**, the Storyteller pulls the characters into the political arena as either one of the characters runs for President of the United States or all of them help a candidate do the same. A variety of characters are introduced, who may wind up as the characters' allies or antagonists, depending on Storyteller need. This scenario is heavy on roleplaying and relatively light on quantum conflict. Storytellers who run more action-oriented series may want to familiarize themselves with the high points and have the events unfold in the background of their regular series as a way of keeping their players up to date on the state of the world.

In **The Apostasy**, Project Utopia takes a major ally for granted and loses him in so doing. In the wake of Antaeus dissolving his ties with Utopia and going solo, envoys from several other organizations, both nova and baseline, move in to recruit him to their cause. Antaeus is extremely intelligent and even more wary of entanglements at this point, however, and he is not easily swayed. In the climactic scene, the players get the opportunity to argue their case and hear the points of view of such nefarious others as Sophia Rousseau and Count Raoul Orzaiz. The crux of this scenario is the players' ability to roleplay social situations and argue decisively for their cause.

Things turn grim in **Gabriel** as the characters are called in to deal with an insane and very powerful nova. Gabriel Melchior's intensive work for Project Utopia has inflicted such massive quantities of Taint on him that he has become one of the most powerful (and unstable) creatures on the planet. Characters are given tools that, in theory, will be able to defeat "The Miracle." If they succeed, Gabriel will die, the plague will be averted, and they will be heroes. If they fail, Gabriel will visit a plague upon the world that could wipe out a large portion of the human race (while leaving novas unaffected). The characters will not be able to overpower Gabriel, and this

scenario requires a great deal of finesse on the part of the characters and good roleplaying on the part of the players.

The final scenario takes place in 2010. Into the Arms of the Angel of Wrath is the story of Andre Corbin's attempt to turn himself in after two years on the run from Project Utopia and its allies. Corbin has no way of knowing that his act will be the catalyst for the first conflict between Caestus Pax and Divis Mal. The ill will generated by this unprecedented quantum battle (and the ensuing raid on the Bahrain facility) exacerbates the antipathy between Utopia and the Teragen almost to the kindling point. The characters may help Corbin to stay alive, or they may assist in his capture or his assassination.

These four scenarios, taken together, reveal a growing unease between novas and their baseline beneficiaries. Some novas are growing tired of fixing problems that they never contributed to in the first place. Others are working so hard to improve their pay, marketability, standing in Utopia or social standing with other novas that they lose themselves to Taint and become dangerous to themselves and those around them. Dark days lie ahead. Those in the know long for the giddy first days of the Nova Age. Even as the doctors of Utopia prognosticate, worry and cast a wary glance in the direction of their nova allies, they know one thing for certain: The Golden Age is over.

Conflict awaits.



N

HOME

N!ertainment

N!terview

N! the news

N!sight

N!tre nous

N!ternet

N!tv

fun N! games

help!

awards

legal stuff

search

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N!contact
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From "The World's Opinion" segment, dated 8/16/08

Is the world ready for a nova President?



• <Name Withheld>, house painter, Moscow: "Why not? Russia has one."

• Ivy Latimer, graphic artist, Bedworth: "I'm quite convinced that nothing is too crazy for America."



• Jenina Goudreau, geneticist, Boston: "I can't imagine anything more dangerous, even if it is The Fireman. The point of a representative democracy is to have leadership that represents the citizenry. A one-in-a-million curiosity of nature doesn't represent anyone."

N!tertainment

N!terview

N! the news

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• Kirsten Kinney, elite, no fixed address: "The wolves'll tear him apart. *Salve, Randelus, propter imminens perebus.*"

<N! Translation: Hail, Randel, for thou art soon to die.>



• Josette Nicholson, retired programmer, San Jose: "I believe it's efficient to give the governance of the nation to someone who could already wreak massive havoc; it keeps the number of threats down. Plus, The Fireman has demonstrated his integrity in the face of power."

Commercial Script

[BACKGROUND: Novas doing impressive but pointless nova stuff.]

• Voiceover: "They're right. Having power means nothing."

[BACKGROUND: More impressive nova stuff. About six seconds thereof.]

• Voiceover: "It's whether you use it responsibly."

[BACKGROUND: The famous still recreation of The Fireman at eruption.]

• Voiceover: "Every President should be a hero."

Welcome to OpNet

Excerpt from a conversation as President Pendleton enters Air Force One.

• Kenyon [*Sun Times*]: Ms. President! Ms. President! What's your reaction to the announcement of Portman's candidacy?

• Pendleton: Mr. Kenyon, I have faced down Radocani and fought roomfuls of hostile Senators. I find a man who can put out fires entirely unimpressive.

[BEGIN OUTPUT]

Begin Input:

Consider nova attributes as a function from human capability to inhuman capability. Consider a nova with attribute Intelligent as an enigmatic, potentially dangerous, individual (a sphinx).

Begin Output:

Baselines that will become novas correspond to eggs. Novas with incomplete Intelligent attribute correspond to smart eggs.

The remaining baselines correspond to children. Novas without attribute Intelligent correspond to children.

Outside Earth (which is space) corresponds to air.

Adult novas with attribute Intelligent <may> live in space. Adult corresponds to <unknown>.

Sphinxes eat children. Novas with attribute Intelligent <may> eat baselines and novas that correspond to children. Eat corresponds to <unknown form of destruction>.

Sphinxes do not match <standard_nova_behavior_patterns.>

Thank you for using Conceptual, Dr. Portman.

[END OUTPUT]

Welcome to OpNet

PRESIDENCY 2008

Calendar of Elections & Events

January 21	Alaska Caucus: Republicans
January 22	Virginia Caucus: American Eagles
January 25	Louisiana Caucus: Republicans
February 4	Iowa Caucus
February 5	New Hampshire Primary
February 9	Delaware Primary, Michigan Caucus: Democrats
February 11	California Caucuses: Libertarians
February 16	South Carolina Primary
February 19	Primaries: Arizona (GOP), Michigan (GOP) and Puerto Rico
February 21	North Dakota Caucus: Republicans and American Eagles
February 22	Primaries: Washington State, Virginia (GOP & American Eagles)
March 4	Primaries: California, Connecticut, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island and Vermont
	Hawaii Caucus: Democrats
	North Dakota Caucus: Democrats and Libertarians
March 7	Primaries: Arizona (Democrats), Colorado, Utah and Wyoming
March 9	Nevada Caucus: Democrats
March 11	Primaries: Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee and Texas
March 18	Illinois Primary
March 22	Alaska Caucus: Democrats
April 1	Primaries: Kansas, Minnesota and Wisconsin
April 22	Pennsylvania Primary
April 24	Virginia Caucus: Libertarians
April 29	Primaries: District of Columbia, Indiana and North Carolina
May 6	Primaries: Nebraska and West Virginia
May 20	Primaries: Arkansas and Idaho
May 27	Kentucky Primary
May 30	Virginia Caucus: Democrats
June 3	Primaries: Alabama, Montana, New Mexico and South Dakota
July 1-4	Libertarian Party National Convention
July 19-24	American Eagle Party National Convention
July 26-31	Republican Party National Convention
August 11-14	Democratic Party National Convention

Characteristics of the Hypothetical Sphinx

1. Vast intelligence beyond that which any known nova admits to
2. Inability to empathize with those of lesser intellect
3. Teenager-like self-identification as a non-human entity
4. Ability to manipulate power structures and individuals like chess pieces
5. Plans underway to reshape the world to her liking
6. One of two destinies:
 - 6a. Domination of the human world, enslavement or destruction of humanity
 - 6b. Transcendence into something greater, leaving the human context entirely behind

From the Journal of Mark Anthony Green

10/8/08

I have been thinking about Heaven.

It seems cruel that the Lord told us of Heaven. He promises Paradise to those of us who are worthy but only if we first endure our time in this world. It is a satisfying world in many ways — a glorious, endlessly beautiful world — but God dangles Heaven above us like a man teasing his dog. Taunting us and making the pleasures of this world therefore less sweet.

I have no one waiting for me there, of course. I am lucky in this. Those who fall into hopeless love and then lose their loved ones — well, the roll of the dice has turned against them. The Lord has violated their souls and hearts, poor unlucky sods, and they have no higher court to turn to in recourse.

I do not think that I shall ever fall in love.

Still, there it sits — above me — tempting, taunting. I cannot understand why the Lord should make all my victories less sweet by telling me of Heaven.

Someday, perhaps, I will erupt and know something of Paradise. To fly like the angels! To see with the eyes of God — to think on a higher level — it would not be appropriate at this time, however.

My ambition tells me that winning this race will make me like a blessed soul and leave me in Paradise. I know that this is not true — that this is simple self-deception. To be President is not to be of the blessed. It is to become like God.

If I become like God, I will not tease the people with stories of Heaven. I will teach them to love the world they have.



Libertarian Party of Michigan Platform

XVI. Novas

1. We oppose government subsidies of individuals and businesses for any purpose or reason, including attempts to balance the "natural economic advantage" of novas in the marketplace.
2. Insofar as a baseline may be unable to achieve just private adjudication of disputes with a nova of certain abilities, we support the use of government funds to make public adjudication practical.
3. We oppose attempts by Project Utopia to add a second layer of government over the federal government of the United States of America, much as we oppose attempts by others to impose unnecessary mechanisms of regulation and law within that government.

Statement of Principles

- I. I respect the people of America.
 - II. I ask them to have courage and faith. I ask them to respect themselves.
 - III. To fix our nation's problems, we need this courage, faith and self-respect. It's a hard job. But it's not a complicated one.
 - IV. I support Christian values. I am a Christian.
 - V. I also support Jewish values, though I am not Jewish; and Islamic values, though I am not of Islam; and Buddhist values, though I do not walk the eightfold path. I am not given by God the authority to judge.
- Neither are my esteemed competitors, I might mention.
- VI. Baselines as well as novas can reshape our world.
 - VII. I seek to represent, not "the people," but you. Each of you. All of you.

*Morrison/
Dempster
'08*

PRESIDENCY 2008

Electoral College Votes

Alabama	9	Alaska	3
Arizona	8	Arkansas	6
California	54	Colorado	8
Connecticut	8	Delaware	3
D.C.	3	Florida	25
Georgia	13	Hawaii	4
Idaho	4	Illinois	22
Indiana	12	Iowa	7
Kansas	6	Kentucky	8
Louisiana	9	Maine	4
Maryland	10	Massachusetts	12
Michigan	18	Minnesota	10
Mississippi	7	Missouri	11
Montana	3	Nebraska	5
Nevada	4	New Hampshire	4
New Jersey	15	New Mexico	5
New York	33	North Carolina	14
North Dakota	3	Ohio	21
Oklahoma	8	Oregon	7
Pennsylvania	23	Puerto Rico	7
Rhode Island	4	South Carolina	8
South Dakota	3	Tennessee	11
Texas	32	Utah	5
Vermont	3	Virginia	13
Washington	11	West Virginia	5
Wisconsin	11	Wyoming	3

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Encrypted Communiqué

From an encrypted communiqué dated 8/19/08

Steve:

If you ever do this to me again, I swear I'll wrap your feet around your head and use you as a racquetball. Do you have any idea what it's like to work for this man?

First, he has more privacy issues than ViaSoft. Which means what for the happy little Secret Service man assigned to watch over him? Well, let's just say I don't appreciate being screwed to the wall regardless of whether I give him space or not, Steve.

Second, honest as Saint Pete is tall, he's nuts. Not irrational for a minute, mind. But he's a sick bastard. It comes out around the corners, past the edges of that politician's face. We were in New York the other day, driving to a dinner, and we see this kid — seven, eight, tops — sprawled in the gutter. And his wife, Lois, says, "Oh my God. Stop!"

Now, I have to think about things like this. Is it safe? I mean, we're talking the middle of New York. I have to think about these things because Mark Green's life isn't just another human life to me — it's a duty.

But Mark Green, why did he have to stop and think about it? Why did he get this look on his face for a minute like what he really wanted to say was, "No — I don't want to be late?"

Of course, we saved the kid. Got her to a hospital. Mark's a big hero.

Here I thought we were friends, and you give me this nutcase when we have The Fireman to protect?

If you ever do this again....

— Bartolomew.

The Voices of Clytemnestra

7/10/08

Objective Clytemnestra:

Let me summarize the political situation facing us, for those of you who have been glued to N! and ignoring the race for the Presidency. Reporters from *The Washington Post* connected Mark Anthony Green last Wednesday to the Institute for Historical Review. That's one of the organizations dedicated to "disproving" the historical record of the 20th century Holocaust. Evidently Green spent most of his college years working for them. Green, questioned on the matter, took an interesting tack. Instead of defending the institute's assertion or claiming to have changed his mind, he expressed his "regret" for the "insensitivity" of his youth. Moreover, he adds, "I don't see it becoming an issue. The people of the institute are historians; would you have some kind of original sin attach to them from a 20th century war?"

Green's doctrine, then, for our country: original virtue. One man, however fiercely he supports the propaganda of another, bears no responsibility for that other man's crimes. In the legal context, I find this principle indisputably excellent. When discussing ethics, it bears closer examination.

Narrative Clytemnestra:

Last month, the police arrested a man named Jules Courtney for the murder of his wife. Listen up; this is a good

story. Evidently, Jules just idolized André Corbin. He had Corbin T-shirts, Corbin baseball caps and little Corbin action figures — hell, he had a Corbin screen saver. Jules didn't just like Corbin, though. He tried to live up to his hero's example. For example, when Corbin would appear at a charity event, Jules would donate to that charity, as sure as day follows night. When Corbin did something heroic, Jules would do big things of his own, like mow his lawn.

I'm not kidding, by the way. This is a guy with a Corbin hair cut.

No big mystery to his motivation, here. Corbin kills Slider; ergo, Jules kills his wife. Like night follows day.

You have to think about this for a moment to get the punch line. No one's proved that Corbin did it.

If Corbin's the innocent victim here, Jules has taken one step beyond following in Corbin's footsteps. No longer the imitator; no longer the cheerleader — he's boldly taken the lead and become more Corbin than Corbin himself. He's struck out on his own and started redefining what being André Corbin means. If the sporty, nova-ish guy can't keep up, too bad.

Emotional Clytemnestra:

It's like Nietzsche said. If you wave your pom-poms for the monsters long enough, eventually you get to play for the monster team. Or something like that.

That's all I have to say about original virtue.



I. Introduction

In Mexico City, a nova sociologist plans revisions to human society. In a small Costa Rican bar, one of the world's greatest geniuses mixes drinks that could subvert the entire temperance movement. And in the United States, it's a hot and sticky summer and politics are spiraling out of control. Four major parties, dozens of smaller parties and a few nova charmers vie for a role in government. Most Americans agree that the more political parties out there, the better — but being next to last in popularity among four major parties makes the Democratic Party extremely uncomfortable. In mid 2008, party leadership decided on a risky, extreme course — backing a nova candidate for the Presidency.

This chancy decision has all four parties running scared — the Democrats because it could blow up in their faces and the other parties because it might not. The nation is abuzz about the very idea of a nova running the country. With three different parties fighting for the conservative electorate, however, the Democratic Party only needs a third of the popular vote to feel confident of victory.

Storytellers can give any popular, well-known nova the Democratic nomination. Moreover, a nova character could make a successful play for it. This book assumes that Randel Portman — The Fireman — is the chosen nova candidate. The Democrats are sure they have a good thing:

Portman is well groomed, a beloved hero and a media figure known throughout the world.

Despite the apostasy of the American Eagle members, the Republican Party remains a force all must reckon with. Its candidate, Bernard Morrison, is the very picture of an elder statesman, combining presence, wit and white hair in a single package. The Libertarian Party struggles tooth and nail to hang on to the power it seized in the 2004 elections. The disaffected, ultraconservative Republicans and Buchananites who left the GOP around the time of the Schroer scandal have built a successful new party, the American Eagle Party, which grows more strident, vituperative and influential with every passing day.

The American Eagle Party runs a clean operation by Washington standards; many of its members even respect the law. Mark Anthony Green, however, who waltzes off in mid-July with its nomination for President, has all the high moral standards of a fairy tale stepmother. As soon as he sees the political picture shaping up in reaction to the Democratic Party's move, he knows he has to use any means at his disposal to quickly and decisively nail the hapless nova to the wall.

The proper tool falls right into Greens's hands shortly thereafter. Randel Portman, inspired by his wife's theories on world events, has been engaging in some speculation on the behavior of hyperintelligent novas. He postulates in his private journal that much of what goes on in the world may



well be guided by the manipulations of such novas. His wife uses the term "sphinxes" to describe them, labeling their willing co-conspirators "adders." Purchasing one volume of Portman's journal from Portman's debt-ridden (and unscrupulous) cleaning woman, Green quickly realizes that it's a gold mine. Portman's notes describe a conspiracy involving fraud, murder, treason and the attempt to reformat the human world. Strategically edited, with most of the handwritten pages torn out, the journal could even implicate Portman as a member of such a conspiracy.

Green does not take the journal to the press. That, in his estimation, is a novice's tactic, suitable only for someone who cannot twist a far more discriminating ear. The stripped-down remains of the workbook go before a closed special session of the Senate Committee on Nova Affairs. Green has many friends there, and he suspects that if he plays things just right, greases a few palms and arranges a few little incidents that confirm his interpretation, the Directive might just haul Portman away before the voters even go to the polls. Green claims not to know why some pages are missing; "Portman must have considered them too dangerous to preserve."

As a backup measure, Green has one of his aides leak a photocopy of the trimmed journal to an appropriate organization — e.g. the Aberrants, who might well identify the Sphinxes with Proteus. (The definition of sphinxes as manipulators of an intellectual order above that of humanity does not appear in the remaining pages. Moreover, Proteus' enemies don't know that's not what Proteus represents.)

Characters with Mental Mega-Attributes that Portman might have approached, or whom he believes to be involved in these conspiracies, can enter the story at this point — as targets of the committee's suspicions and targets of the group that receives the photocopy. It's easy for others to infer that such characters participate in the "Parliament of Sphinxes" described in the journal. Other characters might receive the copy from Green's aide instead.

Portman believes that one or two of the hyperintelligent world manipulators have noticed him. When a copy of the doctored journal finds its way into his hands, Portman decides he needs backup. He cannot handle his personal life, the presidential campaign, Green's underhanded politics and the manipulative "gray eminences" simultaneously. His staff contacts a Directive coordinator, a Utopian facilitator or several independent novas of good character. (Those under the committee's eye would fit best.) This brings Directive, Utopian, Protean or independent characters into the story, unless they later decide not to get involved. Portman explains the general outlines of his situation to those who respond and asks for help. In a way, he's relieved that Green brought some of Portman's theorizing into the open; it means he has nothing to lose by finally unburdening himself.

Portman only contacts Aberrant characters if he himself identifies the sphinxes with Project Proteus (assuming he's even heard of it). This is a valid option for Storytellers wishing to ally him to otherwise unsuitable characters.

On the other hand, Green can hire characters with whom Portman would not associate to help establish Portman's credentials as an enemy of the state. Alternatively, a nova privately sympathetic to the Teragen cause could replace Portman in the campaign. A candidate interested in establishing nova-friendly law would receive most Teragen novas' support. Thus, such a candidate could call on the characters, much as Portman would call on Utopian novas.

Mark Green must provide evidence to verify the suspicions raised by the journal. He employs the classic political maneuvers to get a handle on Portman and Portman's supporters or fellow victims, the characters. These maneuvers include blackmail; precisely tailored and divisive accusations; undercutting the characters' position with political and personal supporters; buying control over part of his opponent's political machinery and arranging for apparently neutral associates to entrap the characters.

Meanwhile, two novas Portman has pinpointed as possible sphinxes — characterized not simply by intelligence greater than they admit but also by a lack of compassion and basic ethics — grow concerned about his candidacy. Corby Carter, an ostensibly Utopian nova specializing in sociology, psychology and genetic science, uses increasingly brutal tactics to scare off Portman's allies. Marietta Jackson, a bartender who believes herself on the verge of transcending human existence entirely, is less worried. Nevertheless, she takes the elementary precaution of aiming three bloody-handed novas in Randel Portman's direction. These novas, the Dominoes, direct their formal loyalty toward an organization like Proteus, Utopia, the Directive or the Teragen. They most likely belong to the organization to which Green's aide leaked a copy of the purloined journal. Jackson's hold on them is simple: They have come to trust her advice.

If the characters associated themselves with Portman's campaign when the opportunity arose, the Dominoes affiliate themselves under a cloak of legitimacy with the Libertarian campaign. This gives them a reasonable explanation for their presence at many of the political events the characters will attend. From this vantage point, they move to entrap the characters, using a thoroughly indoctrinated cat's-paw, Jane Mason, as their agent. Mason believes that she's a former member of the Dominoes who has since changed sides. (She's wrong on one or both points.) The Dominoes intend her to serve as an informant on the enemy's movements, allowing the Dominoes to have them taken into custody by the authorities. Or, if they are legitimate authorities, they will use the information provided by Mason to establish or refute the characters' involvement in the Proteus or sphinx conspiracy.

During the campaign, the American Eagle Party grows progressively stronger. The default outcome for the story is for Portman to barely wrest victory away from Green. An alternative is for President Pendleton to claim victory as Portman and Green scuffle or, for a darker series, for Green to take the election. Note that the actions of the characters can and should have a major impact on the final outcome.

Characters interested in the Slider murder have a few opportunities to pick up the trail. Similarly, characters involved in the murder may have to work to conceal their involvement, having been fingered in a very different conspiracy.

Timeline: Story Events

These events do not necessarily occur in this particular order and the dates are very flexible.

July 27	Mark Green purchases a recently completed volume of Portman's journal.
August 4	Green finishes digesting the contents and determines which pages to remove.
August 5	Green takes the remains of the journal to the Senate committee on Nova Affairs.
August 8	[Possible first moves by Proteus or Aberrants in reaction to the journal.]
August 15	Corby Carter begins moving against Portman.
August 28	Portman finds out about the Senate committee.
August 28	[Portman or Green might contact the characters, if appropriate.]
September	Jane Mason joins Portman's campaign.
September 2	Marietta Jackson turns the Dominoes against Portman.
September 5	Green attempts to arrange a sex scandal involving Portman and nova Raphaela Moore.
September 18	Nova manipulation of the polls uncovered.
September and October	Mark Green takes various actions to "validate" the journal.
September and October	Mason "leaks" information to the characters.
October	Mason betrays the characters.
November	[Possible Directive or Utopian action based on the journal.]
November 4	Popular Elections.
December 15	Electoral College Votes.

II. Themes

This scenario touches on *Aberrant*'s central theme of sacrifice. To protect America from a nebulous threat, Randel Portman works to trap himself in a life he would hate. He should act, in this story, as an Arthurian figure: an honest man battling the human tendency toward corruption. His victory ultimately leads to the bright Camelot of the Round Table or the shattered England of Mordred's crafting. He believes that the world can be saved, and therefore, he must do so.

Alternatively, Portman's opponents can embody other qualities. President Pendleton represents humanity enabled by reason. Bernard Morrison exemplifies humanity purified by faith. A victory for Mark Green, the American Eagle candidate, is a victory for selfishness, hatred and arrogance.

On a more practical level, this story focuses on deception, appearance and manipulation. Unless the characters,

for whatever misguided reasons, seek out situations where they can initiate violence, very little blood is spilled — but the characters may need to think fast to keep their reputation and moral standards intact.

III. Setting

Strange Bedfellows is not set so much in any given location but in the ongoing clash of political campaigns across all of America. Characters can find themselves scanning crowds in small-town America for snipers, arguing before the Senate Committee on Nova Affairs or shaking hands and kissing babies across the country, barely one step ahead of the primaries to keep the votes rolling in. A brief description of the electoral process as a whole follows.

Political Characters

Randel Portman can draw characters into the political world, though some, Mega-Socials in particular, may already live there. For a politically focused series or a series with a few politically minded characters, the Storyteller can start her *Aberrant* game in late 2007 or early 2008. This allows the characters' actions to influence the primary elections and political caucuses, both of which play a crucial role in the development of a presidential campaign. As an alternative, she can spend a few sessions "flashing back" on the early campaign trail experiences of a political character. These flashbacks could lay the groundwork for a Democratic nomination. The Storyteller can also introduce political antagonists at this point.

Running for President

Having a character actively run for President can make for a very intense game. The factions aligning against Portman, listed below, aim their plots at the character instead, making the matter that much more personal.

Any American-born character over 35 can try for the country's highest office. This requires that she establish her own political machine, earn her place on state ballots and ultimately gather enough of the popular vote to earn an electoral college victory. A nova with sufficient popularity can go far as an independent candidate. However, she probably needs a major party's nomination to become anything more than a political joke. (The campaign of Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura illustrates how a nova-like figure can become a political joke, a political success or both at once.)

A character running independently needs signatures from up to five percent of the voting population of each state — based on the previous election's turnout and depending on state law — to add his name to ballots in that state. Such a character probably faces bureaucratic opposition besides. States have gone on record with their objections to excess candidates "cluttering" the ballot.

Storytellers can groom nova characters with political ambition and appropriate Backgrounds and Abilities to take the Democratic nomination when it becomes available. With

6,000 novas in the world, the vast majority of them foreign, selection of an interested character is plausible. A character can also make a play for the Libertarian or Republican nomination, although success is less likely.

If the Storyteller feels that he cannot run an interesting game after the character wins the Presidency, he should talk to the relevant player early on and make sure he's okay with a guaranteed loss. However, an electoral campaign makes an excellent prelude to a game intended to operate at that level of power.

The Secret Service

The Secret Service protects major presidential candidates, major vice-presidential candidates and their families as well as the President and Vice-President and their families. This protection starts as of July 7, 2008 — more generally, 120 days before the November election. A temporary detail of special agents handles this duty, guarding the candidate directly and sending an advance team to survey each site the candidate will visit. The team determines evacuation routes, finds the closest hospital facility and alerts fire, rescue and other public-service personnel. It establishes a command post, coordinates with local police, establishes checkpoints, limits access to the secured areas the candidate plans to visit and adapts Secret Service defensive procedures to the location.

In 2008, Secret Service agents perform basic research on the candidates in an attempt to check for undue nova influence. Normally, this involves a detailed psychological workup and behavior profile, based on information dated long before the campaign, information gathered at the beginning of the campaign and data collected at regular intervals thereafter. Candidates can refuse, as Bernard Morrison did, but this makes protecting them from mental powers more difficult.

The relevant Secret Service detail also studies possible threats. The Secret Service gets touchy regarding Team Tomorrow's offers of assistance with candidate protection, but agents do keep T2M Americas and several generous American novas on speed dial — just in case.

Campaign Staff

There's much more to a presidential campaign than the candidate. A character who cannot or does not wish to run for office herself can still become one of the major players in the Democratic or Libertarian campaign. A popular nova can lend her endorsement to a candidate and make public appearances to round up support, an inhumanly intelligent character can find work as a political advisor, and a superhumanly charismatic character can help handle the press. Some of the specific roles available in a campaign include:

- Chief of Staff: keeping the campaign staff in line.
- Campaign Manager: conducting master planning for the campaign.
- Communications Director: managing media contacts and arranging avenues for the candidate to express her position and personality.
- Financial Director: overseeing strategic campaign

expenditures and acquisitions.

- Budget Director: overseeing the flow of actual funds.
- Political Director: lining up endorsements and delegates within the party.
- Field Director: coordinating local campaign operations into a unified national campaign.
- Volunteer Coordinator: directing the efforts of local or national volunteers.
- Office Manager: running the main office or a local office for the campaign.
- Press Secretary: tactically planning media campaigns and responses to media inquiries.
- Scheduler: controlling the candidate's day planner.
- Deputy or Special Assistant to any of the above: helping the staff survive an impossibly complex job.
- Bodyguard: keeping the candidate alive.

Characters can fill any of these roles and will find them considerably more satisfying than stuffing envelopes. Storytellers should tailor the political challenges facing the candidates to highlight the characters' roles. For example, a major scandal can blow over harmlessly in most venues, but dry up several important sources of funding. This puts a character hired on as the Democratic Financial Director in a bind.

Storytellers can attach respectable but underqualified characters to a campaign using a publicity-motivated appointment. It is a rare nova who doesn't come with a fan club, after all, and a deputy or special assistant can make sure the character doesn't fumble his job. If the character, out of laziness or self-doubt, allows his special assistant to do all the work, that assistant eventually turns out to be corrupt — an embezzler or mole in the pay of another party — leaving the character with no choice but to straighten things out as best he can.

If the characters involve themselves willingly in the political scene and the players seem content playing political games, the Storyteller may wish to cut some of the more *outré* intrigues and plot complications from this story. If the players and characters show little interest in political involvement, the Storyteller will have an opportunity to connect the characters simultaneously to the Democratic campaign and to dramatic nova-scale events below.

Presidential Primaries and Caucuses

The Democratic leadership first comes up with the idea of nominating a nova candidate at the May 30 caucus. It makes this decision public in mid-June, when the decision has sufficient party support. It becomes more or less certain in mid-July. In August, the Democratic National Convention makes the nomination irrevocable.

The expected outcome of the national conventions is a Libertarian nomination for President Pendleton, a Republican nomination for Bernard Morrison, an American Eagle nomination for Mark Anthony Green and a Democratic nomination for Randel Portman. Since the Demo-

cratic Party is actively looking for a nova candidate, a liberal or centrist character can take that nomination with relative ease — beginning her campaign in June or July, if she waits for an invitation.

Summary of the Process

A presidential campaign begins well in advance of election year, with each future candidate gathering support for her candidacy. By the first primary, she needs popular recognition, substantial financial backing, a legion of volunteers and the support of her political party. She also benefits from a solid campaign plan, enabling her to target identifiable factions that she can bring into her camp.

Most candidates begin by addressing those ideological, professional and community groups likely to support them “naturally” at the 60 percent level or higher. The candidate should inspire these groups to vote, with registration drives, recruitment of volunteers from their ranks, monetary donations and activities designed to get these voters thinking politically. A presidential candidate must delegate most of these activities to his campaign staff but should still keep tabs on the process.

The campaign plan also addresses individual voters, even though targeting individuals directly is impossible. Statisticians on staff correlate detailed observations on the behavior of individual voters, organizing them into groups likely to vote the same way. The candidate then studies trends in the beliefs and actions of these groups and tailors her campaign to appeal to them. The campaign manager also charts in advance the stance she expects the candidate's opponents to take on a number of issues.

Conventional wisdom suggests that campaigns concern themselves with one or two of four basic foci. First, the candidate can build a strong organization with great visibility. Second, she can divide voters along ideological lines — e.g., courting the gun lobby and angering gun control activists. Third, she can mount a single-issue campaign, staking everything on a promise to cut taxes or reduce military spending. Fourth, she can overwhelm the opposition with a whirlwind of highly publicized activities. Usually, a candidate who focuses on three or four of these activities finds that her reach exceeds her grasp; contrariwise, ignoring them all causes her campaign to vanish into obscurity.

Standard means for gathering popular support include gaining media time (either bought with money or earned with controversy), making personal appearances and assigning volunteers to chat up supermarket customers as they leave. Another useful tool is campaign paraphernalia, ranging from buttons, signs and bumper stickers that give only the candidate's name to posters and mass mailings describing the candidate's platform. Characters can use this list as a starting point when designing their early campaign, adding personal touches. One character might bargain for an endorsement from MADD and get his name in its newsletter; another might add the Democratic donkey image to

her line of T-shirts.

A good financial director can always dig up some special-interest money. At least one lobby agrees with any given candidate on any given subject. However, getting a larger slice of the pie than the rest of the candidate herd requires heavy negotiation and possibly ethical compromise. The character, in effect, enters into a bidding war, with money on one side and overt support for the lobby on the other. After bartering away support for a lobby's backing, the candidate must then decide whether to weasel around campaign financing laws or content herself with a relatively small gain for her efforts.

Building and organizing a volunteer army to campaign on the candidate's behalf in cities across the country falls on the volunteer coordinator's shoulders. The candidate can hasten the process by visiting the various campaign headquarters, arranging for more interesting giveaways than buttons and so forth. The Volunteer Coordinator also serves as liaison among the various headquarters and develops training materials for the volunteer corps.

The support of major figures within the relevant party helps an early campaign tremendously. Each influential voice that backs the candidate lends legitimacy to the campaign — separating the candidate from the league of small-fry contenders. The candidate and the political director must persuade some of these key figures, compromise with others and bribe a fair number with anything from money to offers of collusion. Having solid backers within her party also helps the candidate receive the party's nomination at the National Convention.

During the middle stages of the campaign, a relatively minor candidate must work to get her name on the ballot in the various states. If her name does not appear on the ballot, the electors for that state must vote for someone else — a blow to anyone's campaign. The four parties detailed in the Factions and Methods section have no trouble with this requirement. Other parties receive only patchwork coverage and gain only the power to deny votes to political enemies.

Later in the campaign, money and popular attention flow in more readily to the remaining candidates. This means that the candidates must wage an ever-intensifying media war, devaluing their opponents in the eyes of relevant backers and the public, while pumping up their own images. Criminal syndicates and foreign countries begin nosing around to see if anyone's for sale. Paragon characters may try to run a “clean” campaign, but history demonstrates that dirt slinging, within reason, wins more votes. Debates between major candidates become frequent, although a typical baseline candidate avoids debating a socially enhanced nova if he can.

The popular election on November 4 partially determines the election's victor. The final victory comes on December 15, when the Electoral College meets. Each state sends a number of electors to this college equal to the number of representatives and senators associated with that state. As a general rule, the party that won the popular

vote in that state chooses this slate of electors. Obviously, a major political party generally chooses electors certain to vote for its candidate. Some states have laws encouraging this behavior. In most cases, however, an elector can vote for whomever she likes. (In 1980, for example, a Democratic elector voted for Ronald Reagan.) If 274 of the 545 electors vote for a presidential or vice-presidential candidate, that candidate is elected to the post.

If no candidate for President receives the appropriate number of votes — not impossible, all things considered — the House of Representatives determines the victor. All the Representatives for each state cast one vote, choosing one of the three candidates who received the greatest number of electoral votes. If no candidate for Vice-President receives the appropriate number of votes, each Senator casts a vote for one of the two candidates with the most electoral votes. In each case, the will of the majority governs.

The electoral voting offers an interesting opportunity for last-minute intrigue. Suppose, for example, a character can feel confident of 200 electoral votes and Mark Green another 180, with the remaining 158 split between the remaining two candidates. A Democratic character must then compromise with both Libertarians and Republicans, agree to take Green on as Vice-President or convince the House to back the character. The opportunities for backstabbing on all sides are finite but inviting.

Mega-Social Novas

A character with social Mega-Attributes might assume that he has the election sewn up from the moment he enters the race. The reason he does not is simple. Most funding for a presidential campaign comes from special-interest groups. A nova with irresistible charm and uncanny manipulative abilities makes a suboptimal President from a special-interest group's point of view. Because the public eats out of that nova's hand, he depends less on the special interest groups that support him. He has less reason for loyalty to his financial backers. SIGs and political-action committees (PACs), therefore, based on rational economic imperatives, reduce their donations to such a candidate until his chance of winning the election matches that of a normal candidate. At that level, each dollar they give him buys as much loyalty as a dollar given to another contender. The nova can charm them into giving him more but runs an ever-greater risk of exposure and a complete loss of public credibility.

Some novas with social Mega-Attributes or mind control powers may choose to interfere in the election rather than run for office. It takes a very savvy nova, or one as smart as he is charming, to schmooze the public at the national level. Manipulators give Pendleton, Portman, Morrison and even Green a city here and there, a few extra organizations and backers and, of course, the votes of their own fan clubs. Most of these effects cancel out, but Green capitalizes on them at a later point in the campaign. Highlighting the activities of one or two nova demagogues and po-

liticos, he implies that the "Nova World Order" is slowly stealing away the freedom of the vote.

One notable case of nova manipulation is discovered on September 18, when Utopian computers discover a consistent pattern of error on almost every major polling service. This underreported the support for Lauren Pendleton by one to two percent, marginally reducing her actual support among voters who watch the polls. The staff members responsible are found guiltless in a summary judgment after video records confirm that a currently unidentified nova "convinced" them all that this was a good idea.

Storytellers may wish to separate the nova Raphaela Moore (described in *Factions and Methods*) from the Republican campaign, making her an important fifth-party candidate who takes advantage of her social Mega-Attributes to capture a handful of states — up to 60 electoral votes. This adds her voice to the electoral melee on December 15, unless the characters take action earlier to prevent unethical voter manipulation.

Green, if he loses the race, might consider figuratively selling his soul to a Mega-Social nova — Corby Carter is a good choice. The nova, in exchange, would incite a flurry of confused cloak-and-dagger bargaining among the candidates that took an insufficient share of the public vote — then walk into the Electoral College and manage the resulting chaos. If all goes according to plan, Green winds up with the Presidency.

Publicity Wars

For the most part, players who involve their characters in speeches and ad campaigns either fall in love with a detailed strategy or skip over all the details entirely. If the players are excited about their campaign, then the Storyteller should assume that their strategy works well but complicate its realization. Hecklers may interrupt speeches, grips may walk off with original ad reels, and the opposition may try to sneak embarrassing errors into the characters' flyers. In the end, though, the characters' bold plan prevails.

If the players are uninspired when it comes to detailing their characters' speeches and ad campaigns, there are more interesting ways to resolve the outcome than a handful of Arts rolls. The Storyteller can give a character a number of opposing publicity initiatives to respond to, a number of staff ideas to build on — or she can run the conflicting advertising initiatives as a tactical combat. If the Storyteller and characters have trouble coming up with appropriate questions and "political" responses in a debate, they can interleave similar tactical conflicts with the played-out arguments.

For each Mega-Charisma enhancement a character possesses, she may choose one Mega-Stamina enhancement for use in "political combat." Similarly, Mega-Manipulation enhancements become enhancements for Mega-Dexterity. Mega-Appearance or Mega-Wits enhancements (pick one) carry over into Mega-Strength. In a game with few social novas, Storytellers might allow the fifth and possibly

fourth dots of the relevant Attributes to count as enhancements for this purpose.

Everything a nova can do in real combat has some equivalent in a social context. For example, throwing an opponent to the ground resembles a personal attack, confusing statement or any other approach that leaves an enemy temporarily at a loss for words. A clinch resembles a competition for a single claim — “I’m the Christian candidate” — that locks both candidates together, unable to strike directly at the others’ position.

An advertising combat takes place over a period of months and uses the appropriate rolls — Arts, Perform, Rapport, Style and Subterfuge, for example. A verbal combat takes place over a series of spoken feints and attacks. (To make a lethal or aggravated attack, one must come up with an extremely nasty strategy.) Characters soak the “damage” from their opponent’s rolls with Charisma and Mega-Charisma and can spend a turn healing one level of damage. What makes this otherwise bland contest of Arts, Perform, Style and Subterfuge rolls interesting is allowing characters to use enhancements as described above and the maneuvers in the combat section. This includes, of course, the Mega-Manipulation Smackdown.

For example, an unambitious character might use Enhanced Movement to keep Mark Green from “closing” while the character is still dealing with Bernard Morrison. Somehow, the dirt Green’s throwing just doesn’t stick. Raphaela Moore, as a fifth-party candidate, might use her Mega-Appearance and winsome ways to utterly Crush someone who impugned her competence. Corby Carter, if for some reason he debated Portman, might attempt an over-the-top Smackdown, accusing The Fireman of stealing condoms from America’s twentysomethings in the name of some outdated moral code and outrage the youth of the nation — or, if he failed his Perform roll, wasting a point of Willpower and looking ridiculous.

IV. Factions and Methods

The American Eagle Party

The American Eagle Party stands for “national sovereignty.” On the surface, given that the United States is already a sovereign country, this platform offers America nothing. The party, however, associates this phrase with the idea of taking back America’s rightful place in the world, reclaiming the respect and power that it feels the country has lost — to Project Utopia specifically. In other words, if you believe the Eagles, America has become a soft, directionless patsy in a world of decaying moral standards and ever-stronger enemies of the state. They want the American leadership and the American people to bestride the world as “kings” once more.

Most Americans like the way things are in 2008, with disease, war and poverty in retreat. However, for everyone unhappy with the new world — the “Nova World Order,” as Mark Green describes the age of Utopia — this rhetoric is heady stuff. The American Eagles stand for a strong dollar, strong family values, freedom from the sinister intentions of novas and Utopia and weeding the weak element out of America’s culture. The Eagles disagree on exactly which elements of society need to go — they name no names — but their platform draws in every kind of hateful radical, and they take whatever donations they can get. (Some of the money in the Eagle coffers comes from the Church of Michael Archangel. Eagle leadership seems to think that its moral authority protects its members from even the most powerful novas’ anger.)

Senator Mark Green emerges in late July as the party’s high priest, with legions of far right provocateurs and rabble-rousers as his clergy. For a baseline, he’s a dangerously charismatic man, a hypnotic speaker with words that linger in the mind regardless of whether one agrees. He has the polished charm of a sociopath, the persuasive power of a schizophrenic and the energy of acute mania — and yet he’s icily sane.

Mark Anthony Green

Mark Anthony Green comes from a middle-class family. His parents and older sister are almost disappointingly normal. They had little to offer a man such as Mark, driven toward greatness, except a stable home that he could always return to. He made his way into Georgetown, building his first political connections there, on brains and grades alone.

Green spent his “searching for identity” years in association with various white supremacist groups. Only one has any records of his membership, that being the Institute for Historical Review, a group of Nazi apologists. Ultimately, Green decided that, for someone of his gifts, personal pride made more sense than racial pride. The road of self-congratulation had its pitfalls and did not give him a warm sense of belonging or the joyful release of hatred, but it offered a better chance for personal greatness.

Journalists tracked down his part-time college job with the institute in early July. Green chose to dismiss the issue. The “enlightenment” that led him to abandon his old cause came from arrogance rather than compassion. Explaining it would not have gone over well. The affair remains one of the greatest dangers to his campaign.

Another thing that imperils Green’s chance for the Presidency is his association with nova Corinna Gilbert. Although the two are intimate, Green considers this a calculated and not an emotional risk. Green can think of many things he might need a nova for. He’s merely her lover; that’s not enough reason for her to go to the line for him — but his aide, Shelley Casperi, is Corinna’s soma supplier.

Green is wonderfully telegenic, with deep pockets — he accumulated a fair sum in his time as Senator — and a talent for coalition building. For this reason, he is dangerous. His web of contacts, unimpressive in scope, boasts a great deal of variety.

Candidate Profile: Mark Anthony Green

Date of Birth: 7/7/1956

Place of Origin: Baltimore, MD

Political Experience: Director of Competition and Regulation Policy at the Competitive Enterprise Institute (2 years), US Senator from Maryland (2 terms)

Strengths: The camera loves Mark Green and so do the special interests. He intends to further Pendleton's work deregulating the marketplace, providing for a smoother transition. Although some Christians find his more pointed speeches repugnant, he does offer a believer's alternative to the atheistic Pendleton, and his record shows strong advocacy for his constituents.

Weaknesses: Mark Green (like the American Eagle Party) is known to sympathize with extremist causes, including modern inheritors to the Nazi ideological legacy and the Church of Michael Archangel. The 2002 challenger for Green's seat in the Senate claimed that Green used Nixonian tactics against her, inciting legal harassment and monitoring her campaign using espionage techniques. Green is an ideological extremist in a centrist world.

Notable Quotes:

"Let Utopia complete its quiet conquest of our world and 10,000 years of baseline history will end."

"Why would [the novas] care? It's not their country."

"Agenda? I have no agenda when it comes to education. I have demands. I will not let our nation descend into doddering senility. Knowledge is power. I require that we become an empowered nation."

Platform Summary, by issue

Abortion: "Under no circumstances."

Affirmative Action: V. Conservative

Capital Punishment: V. Conservative

Crime: V. Conservative

Education: Liberal/Moderate

Gay Rights: V. Conservative

Health Care: Conservative

Military: V. Conservative

Project Utopia: V. Conservative

Religion: Conservative

Taxes: Conservative

Welfare: V. Conservative



Green plays his cards close to his chest. Still, there's a reasonable chance that the characters can find one or two of his secrets and destroy his campaign before November.

Mark Green has a wife, Lois, and no children. His choice for Vice-President is retired General Barret Sumner.

Active Intentions

Green considers Portman more of a threat than Pendleton, even though Pendleton is the incumbent. He can debate, slander and compete against President Pendleton. Just being The Fireman earns Portman a goodly number of unswayable votes. Morrison, the Republican candidate, could surprise him — but, for right now, Green considers the man no threat. Accordingly, Green's sharpest barbs are directed at Portman's campaign. Characters with ties to Portman (the default and most likely case in this story) also suffer at Mark's hands — powerful allies of Portman must go. Characters with ties to Green can help him implement the tactics below against Portman and other targets.

The Journal

Randel Portman started keeping a handwritten journal, writing in bed before he slept, when he realized that his autobiography might be a bestseller someday. When he first became concerned about the "sphinx machinations" (his term; see the Introduction, above, and the Democratic Party subsection, below), maintaining his journal was already a habit. Portman does not feel confident that he can keep everything in his head. Records of his thoughts and observations on this conspiracy or set of conspiracies appear in his journal.

Obtaining one volume of Portman's journal, when a two-faced cleaning woman made it available, struck Mark Green as an elementary precaution. The contents turned out to be a godsend. To imply that Randel himself participated in this conspiracy required no alterations, only the judicious removal of about two-thirds of the pages. (Green later claims Portman removed these pages himself for unknown reasons.)

Excerpt from a Mark Green speech made in Chicago

I'm going to skip the joke and get straight to what you're wondering. What does the American Eagle Party offer the people of Chicago...? Well, let me start with this. Most of you remember what America used to be like. Heck, some of you remember it better than I do. The world feared us. Strong words, but true. Feared us; respected us; admired us. That respect has been dribbling away bit by bit for decades now, but it was there, and I want to bring it back. I won't say we're a joke, in this fine modern age. I'm not going to insult all the people who built our fine nation — including you — with that kind of rhetoric, but I'm telling you, the people of the world remember. They remember Washington. They remember Lincoln. They remember Roosevelt. We have left a legacy, ladies and gentlemen, that echoes through all the world and will echo through all time.... Yet the America of today is a feeble, flopping zero.... Ever since Project Utopia first reared its ugly head, it's been chipping away at our national sovereignty. It wants to take away our power to decide our own destinies. Utopia regulates our technology. Utopia controls our national assets. Utopia wants to create a single world hegemony — say it with me, a nova world order — and it won't be America at the top.... Maybe some of you think they're "good guys." Don't get me wrong. They've done some good things. They'll keep doing good things right up until the moment that they notice they have all the power and we have none.... You know how that story always ends. That's always when the horror begins. So, as I see it, you have two choices. You can cherish your weakness and take the bones Utopia throws us and watch the emasculation and enslavement of America within your lifetime, or you can help me make America strong again.

Mark takes this partially edited journal before a special, closed, out-of-season session of the Senate Committee on Nova Affairs. He paints Portman and novas referenced in the journal as conspirators associated with ungodly crimes. "Forget this Utopian conspiracy nonsense. This man — this presidential candidate — is either connected to a deadlier syndicate than the Camparellis, or he's living in a fantasy world."

The distinguished members of the committee are inclined to hem and haw over the evidence indefinitely. Green helped many of them with their careers, so ignoring him is not an option. On the other hand, his conflict of interest is blatant enough to raise doubts about the material. A key effort for Green in the months that follow is providing enough evidence to push the committee into taking action. For example, a properly phrased missive from the committee to the Directive, suggesting that Portman's candidacy is a threat to national security, could have any number of beneficial effects for Green's campaign.

Green's aide, Shelley, leaks a photocopy of the edited journal to those most likely to be concerned. The Aberrants might make the assumption that Portman's "sphinxes" are

one face of Proteus and act against Randel. Teragen novas, less paranoid regarding Proteus but easier to contact, might do the same.

Sex, Lies and Switchboards

Damaging Portman's sterling reputation makes Green's case more believable. It also reduces The Fireman's share of the vote. Therefore, Green begins a smear campaign. The first step, of course, is manufacturing a sexual scandal.

Raphaela Moore, a nova actress, has a track record of ambition, libido and spite. She resides in San Francisco, when not working. Portman has a speech scheduled in that very city. When he and members of his staff arrive at a SF hotel late the night before, a system cracker in Green's employ goes to work on the phone lines in to and out of the hotel. Around 2 A.M., the cracker redirects the hotel switchboard. (This allows him to "prove" that the calls he subsequently places come from Portman's suite. Someone suspicious need only look up the hotel and call him back.) He electronically adjusts his voice and puts in a call, as Portman, to Moore's agent. Having obtained Moore's home number, he calls her live-in aide and leaves a message for her.

The call invites Moore to the hotel, indicates Portman's long-term admiration for the actress and hints blatantly at a possible liaison. Green's intentions are simple. He correctly assumes that Moore will respond, that night or soon thereafter. Portman is a candidate for President, after all. He hopes that rejection, on the heels of anticipation, will turn Moore's interest into anger. He expects her to then use the calls to her agent and her aide as proof of Portman's infidelity. If she fails to do so, he hopes that an associate can capture her arrival at Portman's door on film.

This can play out in many ways, particularly if the characters are in Portman's suite when Moore arrives. Storytellers in need of a femme fatale character to complement the political intrigue in this arc can assume that Green's plan works as expected or even that Moore successfully turns Portman's head. Alternately, Moore can display good sense, swallow her humiliation and pretend the event never happened. Either way, Raphaela Moore's interest in the political process has been piqued. She later modifies her appearance and attaches herself to Bernard Morrison's campaign.

The Prisoner's Dilemma

Green faces a great danger in the characters — a group of presumably united novas who likely develop a grudge against him at some point. He therefore takes decisive action to turn the characters against one another and Portman as soon as he can anticipate this threat.

An obvious deception may occur to the Storyteller, based on who the characters are. If one character spent a lot of time comforting another character's husband while his spouse was in the hospital, an allegation of impropriety can lead to internal tension. Similarly, someone using a listening device (say, bouncing a laser off a windowpane to pick up the sound vibrations or simply using a high-powered shotgun mike) could pick up on a private conversation and then quote it online, alleging that one character passed it on.

Practical Journal Management

The journal volume that fell into Green's hands is the latest one filled. Randel had moved on to a new volume less than 15 weeks before. For this reason, it may include notes on even recently erupted novas, e.g. appropriate characters. Randel Portman acquires a copy of the trimmed version from a fan cum Senate clerk just before the session begins. At this point, he may seek allies outside his usual avenues. Utopian pressure on the Senate Committee on Nova Affairs could backfire horribly, after all.

Since Portman did not intend his journal for dissemination to the Senate, he wrote in loose fashion. If he considered approaching a nova, that information entered his journal; if he considered a nova untrustworthy and a possible "adder" (a sphinx's tool), that observation also entered his book.

Novas that Portman could trust, including any characters he does bring onto his team later, can find themselves part of the Senate committee's investigation. Untrustworthy but independent novas, otherwise difficult to involve in a presidential election, can also fall under the committee's eye. Green pursues all of these novas' dark secrets (real and newly minted) with an even greater ferocity than the committee. He wants to prove to the committee that his fabricated theory is correct.

Particularly unethical independent characters may find themselves targeted for recruitment instead. Portman most likely expressed his concerns about such novas in strong language. The characters might not want a President who knows they exist, loathes them and suspects them of terrible crimes. Green feels that collaboration with such novas could prove beneficial. He would make contact through his aide, of course, avoiding opportunities for the press to see them together.

Characters accused before the committee, when they learn about this, probably assume that everyone Portman wanted to contact is innocent of wrongdoing. A devious Storyteller can take advantage of this. For example, a Proteus agent or Directive killer (possibly involved in the Slider murder) might have struck Portman as the honest type, worth approaching. If Portman recorded this thought in the relevant journal volume and Mark Green did not remove that page, that agent comes under suspicion. She might then approach the characters to help clear all of their names. This scenario also applies if Portman suspected both the characters and the agent of wrongdoing. Either way, this can "hook" the characters into the ongoing story of the Slider murder or simply set them up for a surprise.

Portman's remaining volumes also offer a hook interested characters may use to find more information on the Slider murder. Portman's observations yield five or six names the characters have not yet investigated. One proves relevant. (Looking for one conspiracy, it is easy to find another.) Characters might also investigate names obviously removed from the record, appearing regularly in earlier volumes but not at all in the committee's version. One of these names could belong to an operative of some allegiance who had an opportunity to prune the journal pages — a second time — before the committee studied them.

The committee and Mark Green are not the only ones studying the journal. While Green tries to generate more evidence and the committee stalls, interested parties may do some actual investigation of the characters and Portman. The Aberrants, Proteus, Utopia or even the Directive can come sniffing around the characters' doorstep. If Portman's observations match the faction's own thoughts, they might be very hard to dissuade.

A man presenting himself as a researcher for the Senate Committee on Nova Affairs approaches the characters (and Portman, if applicable) as a group. He explains the nature of the current inquiry and notes that any characters wanting favorable treatment in the event that the "matter under consideration" turns ugly should come and speak to him at an appropriate Senator's office. Anyone investigating him finds that no one of that name works at the office. Afterward, the committee calls several characters, at various times, to present testimony before it.

Green intends to sow paranoia with this series of events. Ideally, in his mind, a character not called before the committee must then assume that the characters called betrayed her. Further, she probably assumes that the characters called committed some crime worth turning in someone else for.

If one of the characters takes mox or adrenocilin, Mark attempts an even uglier and more divisive deception. Corinna Gilbert is an expert at reassembling destroyed patterns, including those of cremated bodies. It is difficult to tell one container of ashes from another, and Gilbert has no difficulty substituting a random pile of ash for the ex-body she

needs. Taking that ash with her, she enters Portman's campaign offices at 4A.M., undoing entropy's work as far as she can, until a corpse lies there. She also provides a bottle of pills. She adjusts the scene until it seems like a kid somehow got in and took medicine that the character irresponsibly left lying about.

If the Storyteller plans to use this device and the character ever leaves her medicine supply unguarded, Gilbert should steal one bottle some time beforehand.

Cutting the Strings

Utopia supports Portman and, possibly, the characters. This also raises a problem for Green. In fact, since no character exists in isolation and most have an organization or an agent to turn to, cutting the characters' support network is a vital part of action against them. Green will not be ready to take on the whole of Project Utopia, for example, until and unless he achieves the highest office in the land.

Green feels that innuendo and artifice do not fit this job. If his other schemes fail, they merely actualize an existing threat. Lying to the characters' supporters could create a new threat. Therefore, in the case of Utopia, he puts out feelers for relatives, friends and other such associates

of important Utopian bureaucrats who seem purchasable. This includes people who need money for surgery or drugs, those who could use a peccadillo committed in America covered up and anyone with a mite or other expensive habit to support. He then buys them and uses them to control the Utopian bureaucrats themselves. He also seeks out ethically challenged professional associates of independent characters and offers them subtle bribes. A character's attorney, in particular, makes an excellent choice — most attorneys know better than to let non-clients buy them, but an attorney turned against his employer is a frightening thing. In all cases, the goal is to dry up the characters' support.

This approach is simultaneously easier and more difficult for characters who live in a shady world — terrorists, cartel novas and so forth. Purchasing the suppliers, information dealers and underworld financiers such characters associate with is a simple business proposition. Finding them is more difficult. Use an opposed Contacts roll to determine how well Green can kick the crutches out from under such characters.

Green is not above bribing important members of Portman's campaign staff — regional coordinators in several states or the budget director, for example — if he thinks it will allow him to turn voters against Portman or undermine the campaign from within.

Nails in the Coffin

Green has a simple two-part plan to close the door on the case he's making for the committee. After a long search, he found a hook on the Secret Service agent who initially researched Portman's background. This is the same man who would research the characters' backgrounds if they spend time in Portman's company. The agent had a desperate aspiration in his recent youth to make it as a pop star; he even funded the publication of his own CD. It sank without a trace, never even catching enough public interest to be disliked. This is no longer a problem; a major publisher is now "interested." In return, Green asks for a trivial amount of assistance.

Green sends Gilbert after the Secret Service files on Portman and, if appropriate, the characters. He destroys the files; when authorities try to figure out why someone took the files, the agent (Norman Tallow) explains his best guess — that someone wanted to cover up Portman's one-time ties to several inappropriate contacts (e.g. Corbin, Sierka or cult leader Kelly "Calliope" Pierson.) Of course, Tallow admits, his memory of the research is faulty, the sources he talked to seem to have vanished and he might be wrong.

The second part of the plan is a straightforward setup. A Directive agent or other authority figure contacts the characters to discuss Mark Green's campaign against them. Arriving at the meeting place, the characters discover surface indications of a firefight involving novas with powers identical to their own. (These are falsified.) If a public place, it has been emptied. The agent now brings a different story to the authorities. She called the characters to the meeting

place to investigate their connection to Proteus (or a generic "sphinx" conspiracy). They then became hostile and assaulted her. A genuine wound, which the woman accepted in exchange for three million, appears to confirm her story.

Final Play

If the characters outwit Mark Green every step of the way, he has one last trick to try. If no real evidence ever develops to make the journal more incriminating, then Green's had to grease palms at the Senate Committee on Nova Affairs just to keep it listening. The last sleight in his arsenal is to blackmail the committee — because that money doesn't come from Mark Green's personal or campaign accounts. It came from an account that, under an accountant's microscope, seems to lead back to Portman's staff. (Novas with Mega-Intelligence of three or above can probably track the money to Green, but it's an airtight lie from a mundane perspective.) This creates a convincing perception, if it reaches the press, that Portman has been paying the committee, while it dragged out its deliberations, refusing to take action against him. That means, in turn, that the allegations must be true. Green intends, hopes and expects to take everyone down with him — if it comes to that. Of course, the alternative is for the committee to intervene on Green's behalf in the budding conflict between the American Eagle Party and The Fireman.

The Democratic Party

The Democratic Party shares Utopia's vision for the world: a peaceful assembly of nations, placing human happiness and productivity a little bit above human freedom. It aspires to become America's voice for equal rights, public safety, the environment, education and the needs of the disadvantaged. Democrats did not perform well in the primaries, however, not because the people disliked the message but because the moral standards of the candidates did not match the ethics of the party. Moreover, as one voter put it, "We already have a Project Utopia."

In June, the Democratic Party searches for a candidate who would make these two public-relation problems moot. Choosing a popular nova, in particular, would make the similarities between the Democratic platform and the Utopian mission statement natural, rather than redundant. It would also remove the character issue.

The Storyteller has three major options when selecting the Democratic candidate. One option is Randel Portman, The Fireman — a perfect choice from a PR point of view. This is the default option. The Democratic Party could also choose one of the characters, if appropriate. The final possibility is an established or new Storyteller nova. Portman has moral qualms regarding the Aberrants and an active dislike for the Teragen. If a group of Aberrant or Teragen characters would enjoy this story best while working with the Democratic candidate, the Storyteller should select a more appropriate nova than Portman for the candidacy — one willing to associate with the characters.

After selecting a nova, the Democratic Party poses a substantial threat to the other campaigns. No one can reli-

ably predict the public's ever-changing reaction to Portman's candidacy, even with advanced polling techniques. Political commentators suggest that novaphiles, Fireman fans and Americans who believe in Portman's relative purity could have a disproportional effect on the race — with a much greater percentage of them turning out to vote than the American norm. Moreover, President Pendleton, Bernard Morrison and Mark Green all expect a fair share of the conservative vote, while liberals and moderates have only one real candidate to choose from.

Randel "The Fireman" Portman

In 1978, only a few minutes after the *Galatea* explosion, firefighter Randel Portman responded to a traffic accident. On the scene, he found a burning school bus full of children. His desperate need to save them caused the very first publicized eruption — transforming Portman into a nova and granting him the ability to absorb energy. His power saved the children from the inferno and made him an instant celebrity. That was 10 years ago.

Portman found continuing as a firefighter more or less impossible; the people of New York would ring alarms or even set fires in the hopes he would respond. This hit him hard — he defined himself by his ability to save people,

directly and by his own hand. While his powers made that much easier, his fame made it unachievable. After a month of trying to maintain a normal life, Portman unhappily shifted into a career of public activism, supporting himself financially with media appearances, endorsements and Fireman action figures. He fought disasters when he could, allying with Project Utopia and (when an opportunity arose) with local emergency services. Most often, because no one else wanted to risk the Fireman's life, he found himself unable to help at all.

Portman's celebrity also affected his wife's career. A lecturer on political science and history, Jennifer Portman found her classes interrupted with ever-greater frequency by questions about her husband, nova affairs and the nature of quantum powers. By 2001, she had become a minor expert on such things purely in self-defense. In 2002, hybridization between the two studies and a particularly vigorous seminar led her to develop the theory of the "sphinxes."

Her reasoning went as follows. The intellectual potential of novas, like all their abilities, is theoretically unlimited. Given the patterns of nova development, it seems almost certain that novas exist of enormous mental accomplishment. Such savants would make commonly known geniuses like Vladimir Sierka seem dimwitted in comparison.

Candidate Profile: Randel Portman

Date of Birth: 1/18/1972

Place of Origin: New York City, NY

Political Experience: Minor grass-roots experience.

Strengths: Everybody knows Randel Portman. They talk about him and whether he'd make a good president — and all publicity is good publicity. He's a hero, and the whole world knows it. He'll try hard to do a good job. The whole world knows that, too.

Weaknesses: Randel Portman has no qualifications except star power and raw power. Many Americans are uncomfortable with the idea of a nova running the country. Many more would prefer a nova with a superior mind.

Notable Quotes:

"The country doesn't need a political genius. It needs an honest man."

"I am not a Utopian. I am an American."

Bernard Morrison on Portman: "I cannot deny that there are certain advantages to a nova President. For example, if a giant fire-breathing monster threatens Congress, he can jump into Air Force One and rush to the rescue."

Platform Summary, by issue

Affirmative Action: Liberal/Moderate

Capital Punishment: Conservative

Crime: Conservative/Moderate

Education: Liberal

Gay Rights: Liberal

Health Care: V. Liberal

Military: Moderate

Project Utopia: Liberal

Religion: Moderate

Taxes: Moderate

Welfare: Liberal/Moderate



Alternatively, Sierka and other "great minds" are concealing the full extent of their precocity. In either case, these hyperintelligent novas, whom Ms. Portman dubbed the sphinxes, could potentially be the greatest threat facing both baselines and other novas. They would operate outside the human context. Able to manipulate the entire world like a chessboard, they could not help arranging it to their liking. An evolutionary step beyond just about everyone else, they would inevitably remake whole cultures to their taste.

Originally, she considered this theory an experiment in speculation. Eventually, she became convinced of its truth and convinced her husband in turn. They began consider-

ing ways to interfere with this unpleasant human destiny.

The Portmans studied the problem, the novas who might be a part of it and the novas who could help them rectify it. Ultimately, they decided to reorganize the political structure of the United States, hoping to restructure the incestuous networks of power that an advanced mind would find easy to manipulate. Uncertain how to work on the national level, Randel started loudly advocating campaign-finance reform and an end to political corruption in New York. Ms. Portman traded on her basic intelligence and her connection to her husband to enter a policy think tank and work from there.

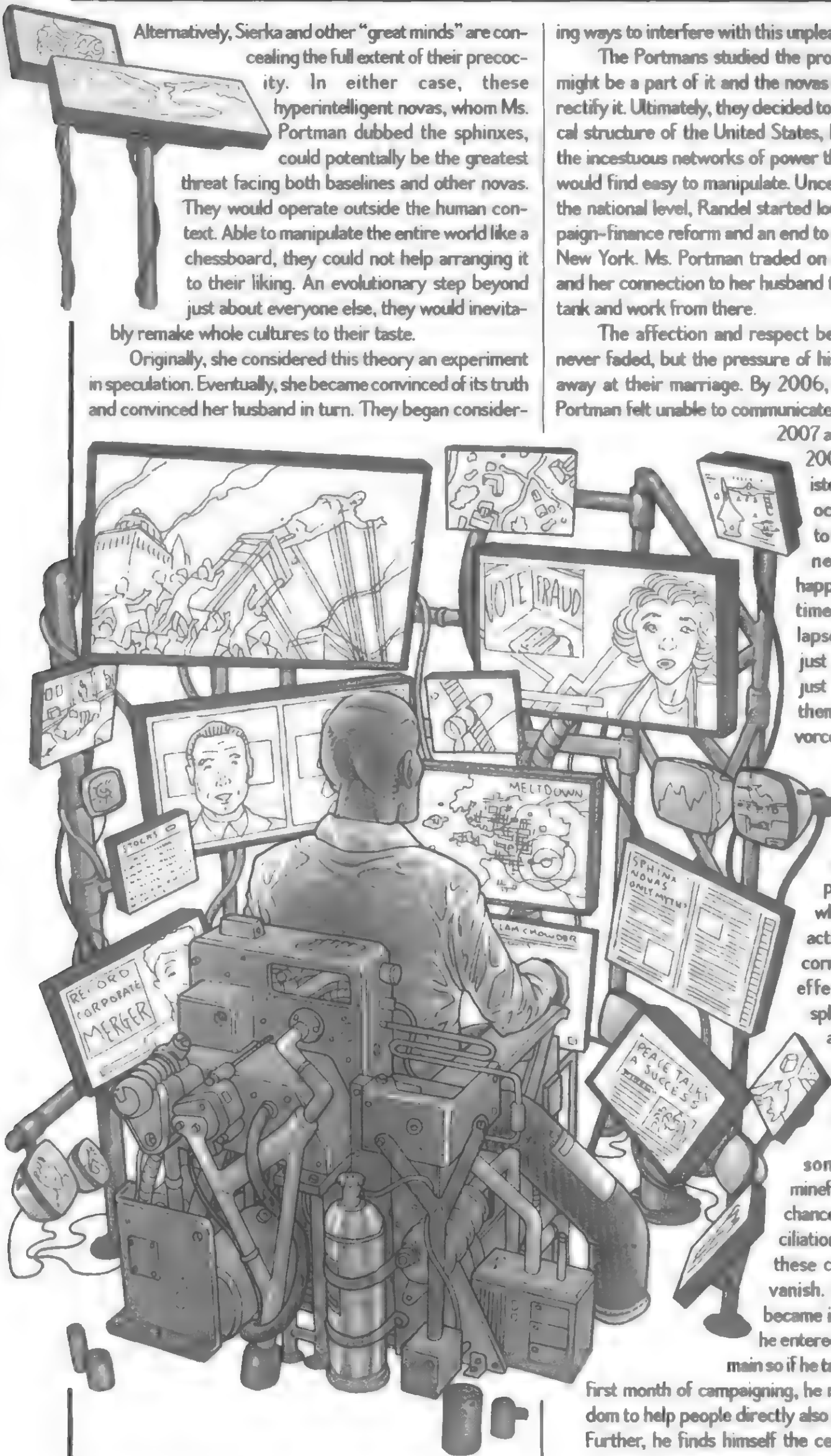
The affection and respect between the Portmans never faded, but the pressure of his celebrity slowly ate away at their marriage. By 2006, Randel and Jennifer Portman felt unable to communicate with one another. By

2007 and continuing through 2008, their marriage existed only on paper. They occasionally attempted to rebuild their old connection, recapturing happiness for months at a time, but it always collapsed. They succeeded just often enough, and for just long enough, to keep them from pursuing divorce as an option.

When a chance at the Presidency opens up, Portman jumps at it. He has no choice; it offers him a position of power from which to take decisive action. If his theories are correct, it would let him effectively oppose the sphinxes. If not, he could at least use the power of the Presidency to do more good than he could without it.

This opens a personal and political minefield under his feet. His chances at a working reconciliation with his wife under these circumstances all but vanish. The divorce option became impossible the instant he entered the race and will remain so if he takes office. Within the

first month of campaigning, he realizes that his freedom to help people directly also goes away if he wins. Further, he finds himself the center of an enormous



controversy and hoist on his own campaign-finance reform petard.

Even with widespread recognition and the huge voluntary donations ordinary citizens send his campaign, Portman's campaign lacks financial oomph. Most special interests will have nothing to do with him — too much of a wild card — and he's stuck with the legal limits on donations from the rest. A minor budgeting impropriety for any other candidate would be a real black eye for someone known to hate the funding game.

Storytellers substituting a new nova for Portman should translate the basic elements of Portman's situation. To fit the story and the Democratic motivations best, the nova candidate should command the public's respect and must appear to have strength of character. For a more sordid story, that appearance of honor can be a mere façade concealing Taint and political corruption.

Portman's choice for Vice-President is Congresswoman Carol Migden.

Jennifer Portman is concerned about the possible menace that "sphinxes" may present, and she argues that any group that gets an evolutionary "leg up," like a true super-brain would, always displaces predecessor species from their shared evolutionary niche. Human cultures with similar advancements enslave or dominate their old competitors instead; this is not much better.

She further suggests that sphinxes cannot look at a world where they can push one button here and things become better for them there and not push that button. Of course, once they've arranged the world to their liking, no one will ever be able to stop them again. The only reason for hope is that it's hard to change the world, so they might not be done.

The Portmans believe that all novas beyond a certain threshold of intellect inevitably become sphinxes. Geniuses below this threshold become pawns ("adders") or wildcards ("smart eggs") and can be benevolent.

The Storyteller determines the degree to which the sphinx theory is valid. Elements of this story suggest that it contains several half-truths.

Pre-Established Conflict

Utopian scientist Corby Carter is on Portman's short list of "adders" that might be sphinxes. Portman is mostly correct. Carter has a better mind than he admits to and an agenda of his own. He has not yet passed the postulated threshold into true inhumanity, however.

Portman has spent time digging into Carter's affairs, and the nova now begins considering an active response. His methods are described later in this section. If Portman can ever demonstrate Corby Carter's hostility, of course, Carter leaves Utopia — if he's lucky enough not to "vanish."

Active Intentions

Portman intends to win the election. It would trap him in 4-8 years of an ever more troubled marriage. It would rob him of the chance to rescue anyone with his own hands.

The Presidency would not make him happy. It would, however, give him the leverage to rescue everyone in the world.

Portman's early campaign strategy plays on his completely legitimate status as a Washington outsider — something many politicians claim but which few actually possess — and his acts of valor as a baseline firefighter. He realizes not long into the campaign that these tactics are not working. The public does not really want him to be a serious candidate. Reluctantly, he adds glitz and nova glamour to his overall campaign plan. This naturally reinforces opinions of him as a "heroic demigod" (in his supporters' eyes) and a "fluff candidate" (in his detractors').

Portman intends to focus on personal appearances at the expense of a proper media campaign. This plays on his nova-next-door image and requires less practiced charm than the alternative. He's hoping that the public sees this approach as the kind of thing an honest Washington outsider would do.

Removing Obstacles

Mark Green presents selected pages of Portman's journal to a closed special session of the Senate Committee on Nova Affairs, tying Randel Portman to the very conspiracy he hopes to fight. (The committee is unlikely to know about Project Proteus, but if it does, it may assume that the sphinxes are Proteus-related in some way.) Portman first hears of this on August 28.

Portman decides that he needs help to handle both Carter and Green during a full-time presidential campaign. If the characters work for the Directive or Utopia, he asks their organization for help. To justify having a group of novas around him, he offers to assign them appropriate roles in the campaign. Experienced politicians, capable administrators and hyperintelligent novas can join his campaign staff. Novas merely interested in politics can take on deputy and special assistant roles. Others can become media allies, bodyguards and so forth.

If the characters are independent but reasonably trustworthy, he approaches them instead of a major organization. He has one of three reasons for selecting the characters in particular, out of all the trustworthy novas in the world. One possibility is that he mentioned them in the pages Green presents to the Senate, accidentally making them targets. Another is that they already have roles in his campaign. Finally, they may have encountered sphinxes before. In the latter case, if the Storyteller decides to use actual sphinxes in her campaign, she can run one or two flashbacks illustrating how dangerous the most intelligent novas can be.

If independent characters reject his request or Utopia/Directive/Proteus agents refuse the assignment, Portman stresses the sheer interest value of participating in a presidential campaign — then drops the matter and gets back to his job, whatever the characters decide.

Portman will not approach Teragen sympathizers. The Storyteller can decide whether or not he believes in Proteus and is therefore willing to approach peaceful

Bringing Portman to Life

Here are some ways to make it clear to the characters what the election costs Portman.

A poorly placed bomb goes off near the site of a speech, collapsing a building and trapping several baselines within. Portman naturally tries to "go to the rescue," but instead, gets hustled off by the Secret Service, a plaintive expression on his face.

A photo opportunity with one of the youths Portman saved back in 1978 gives a reporter the opportunity to ask, "If America gains a nova President, do we lose a Fireman?"

A visit to Portman's home is interrupted late at night by the repetitive sound of doors slamming. Novas with enhanced senses or a tendency to pry discover Ms. Portman marching into her husband's room, saying something argumentative, walking out and slamming the door. Almost immediately afterward, Randel does the same with her room. This continues for a while.

Jennifer Portman develops a look of horror and panic, before mastering her expression, when she opens the door on a crowd of reporters.

Aberrants.

As a presidential candidate, The Fireman has no free time to wage war against Mark Green, Corby Carter or anyone else. If he has trustworthy allies, however, he will place these matters in their hands.

If Randel Portman (or Storyteller-played Utopian agents) deal with Green's slander campaign without the characters' assistance, they use the following tactics. First, Portman digs intensively into Green's past, hoping to tie him to a violent hate group rather than a simple apologist organization. Second, he holds a preemptive press conference explaining the allegations, noting Mark Green's obvious reasons for bringing them to the Senate and denying their merit. This hurts his campaign — by denying the allegations, he gives them the appearance of substance — but hampers Green's attempt to remove him more permanently.

The Libertarian Party

The Libertarian candidate has an immense advantage in this race — she's already the President. A well-spoken and confident woman with a powerful presence, Lauren Pendleton expects to take the election easily, no matter how the Democrats and the Eagles posture. Thanks in good part to Utopia's efforts worldwide, the American economy is running very strong. It takes a lot to dethrone a President when America has food on its tables.

President Pendleton's platform, a close derivative of the Libertarian Party platform, advocates the dismemberment of government. She argues that the nation should restrict the federal government's role to the functions laid out in the Constitution — thereby putting an end to wel-

fare, foreign interventionism, federal interference in commerce and, eventually, the income tax.

The scope of her plan is her major political liability. Four years amounts to the blink of an eye when it comes to tearing down a government built up over generations. In the average American's life, however, it seems a very long time. Each small victory earned her kudos in its time, but looking back in 2008, many Americans wonder, "What exactly has she done in all her years as President?" The income tax still exists. The United States and Utopia still get along. The Directive, an abomination in the eyes of a typical Libertarian, still meddles in the affairs of America and the world. In general, the world has not become a paradise. Americans, conditioned all their lives to expect little from Republicans and Democrats, nevertheless, expected a lot from the bold new Libertarian order. The media heralded Pendleton as a great national experiment, and Pendleton accepted this good press as a windfall. Now she pays the price.

Lauren Pendleton

President Lauren Pendleton decided decades ago, as a college sophomore, that all the ugly things in the world derived ultimately from a single lie: "You have to accept this." In Pendleton's opinion, she does not have to accept anything, and the gods help anyone who gets in her way.

She does not rage or rant. She speaks with measured passion, each word chosen calmly, as a weapon against the world. Her heart does not bleed for the aimless masses; she considers herself an advocate for the determined. Her personal work and her loftiest ambition is to ruthlessly strip away every apparatus of government that can interfere with the expression of personal will.

Pendleton was still essentially clean when she first made it to the Presidency. Corruption and honesty mean little to her, of course, concepts almost irrelevant to her severe ethical code — but pride kept her honest when selling out offered no substantial gain. In the 2004 elections, the morally destructive influences in the nation's political circles did not bother with the Libertarian candidate until far too late. As President, however, Pendleton has compromised both the Libertarian ideals and her own, every step of the way. Pushing the Libertarian agenda through Congress all but required pandering to a new Republican, Democrat or lobby every day. After backing an occasional piece of big-government legislation herself — as part of various deals, of course, but nevertheless — she abandoned her lofty attempt at ethical hygiene. The special interests, far more interested in her as the President than as a candidate, now pay her quite well. Her grand ambition remains, but she has fallen into the political world.

Pendleton, as the current President of the United States, has access to a great many resources. Unlike Portman and the media, she can tie Mark Green to an active hate group in his youth. Green avoided a paper trail during his association with a society called the "Aryan Martyrs," going only by his first name and steering shy of po-

Candidate Profile: Lauren Pendleton

Date of Birth: 9/12/1952

Place of Origin: Irvine, CA

Political Experience: CA Representative, Incumbent President.

Strengths: President Pendleton, as the incumbent, represents a known quantity — people associate her with America's relative prosperity and also with the office of the President. Pendleton also has vast political power with which to pursue funding and her campaign. A poll of America's women indicates that, even among those who disagree with her policies, many feel they owe her a debt for cracking the boys'-club model of the Presidency.

Weaknesses: In a time when the public is sharply divided regarding Project Utopia, the mildly anti-Utopian Libertarian stance appeals to few on either side of the issue. Many Americans question the effectiveness of her policies. A small but statistically significant minority of men feels that a female President is an infringement on the natural order of the world.

Notable Quotes:

"America's prisons increasingly resemble the tiger cages of Vietnam. If you can explain to me, sir, how locking someone in a tiger cage is less of an atrocity than drug use, I will happily admit to the existence of this so-called 'crime.'"

Recurring Partial Quote:

"...is a matter outside the government's jurisdiction."

Platform Summary, by issue

Affirmative Action: V. Conservative

Capital Punishment: Conservative/Moderate

Crime: Liberal

Education: Conservative/Moderate

Gay Rights: V. Liberal

Health Care: V. Conservative

Military: Liberal

Project Utopia: Conservative

Religion: Liberal

Taxes: "The income tax should ultimately be abolished."

Welfare: Conservative



lice interest — but his peer group came to the attention of the FBI at one point. The bureau long ago tied Green's name to his picture. Pendleton buried the file, on the premise that it would "prejudice the election," but she's not covering for Green. (Racism can ruin the lives of determined, enabled individuals and, therefore, qualifies as evil by her personal code.) Rather, she appreciates Green's energy and ruthlessness and hopes he will clear away some of the competition before she sees to it that the file become public.

Pendleton is married to businessman Ted Mactire and has no children. As Vice-President Nicholson is in extremely ill health, her choice for Vice-President is New Hampshire Congressman Trent Williams.

Active Intentions

Considering herself a supremely rational and enabled individual, Lauren Pendleton intends to aggressively pursue opportunities for direct debate with her opponents. She has a large staff of competent media consultants; she leaves the advertising campaign up to them. This results in a low-content but emotionally appealing series of advertisements in all media — she does not neglect the OpNet and other nontraditional avenues — with an overall message of "The government has grown uglier, more unwieldy, more unconstitutional and less pleasant to live under for

230 years. Four years ago, you elected Lauren Pendleton President. Already, the tide turns."

Not long after campaigning begins, Pendleton authorizes a Directive operation within America's borders to take Geryon down. The operation starts with the complete takeover of the media in a small town in Nevada. Shortly afterward, according to reports by the "journalists" on the scene, Geryon wanders into a casino for a little gambling. Despite the fact that everyone falls over themselves to make sure he wins every game, he nevertheless loses his temper and goes on a killing spree when the roulette wheel does not go his way.

This scenario is a Directive fabrication. Geryon is half-way around the world when his supposed "killing spree" is occurring. (Moreover, as a rational monster, he kills only when baselines are threatening, harming or killing novas.) Pendleton made sure that no paper trail connected her to this action, and she has cloaked the whole operation so carefully that she now enjoys the luxury of plausible deniability with regard to the whole issue.

Last-Ditch Defense

If scuffling between Mark Green and The Fireman doesn't take them both out of the political picture and Pendleton's reelection prospects look dim, she takes deci-

sive action.

If Portman is the greatest threat, Pendleton develops an extensive profile on him and then moves on his personal weaknesses. In consequence, the prestigious Oxford University offers Jennifer Portman a Corresponding Membership and a dream job studying the history of British politics, on condition of her spending six months a year on site. Ms. Portman is not a "political wife," willing to sacrifice everything for her husband's career. This opportunity, although she does not take it, increases the stress that her husband's candidacy puts on them both.

Selections from the Directive's files most supporting the possibility that Project Proteus is causing nova sterility — and Portman's own inability to sire a child — appear on Portman's desk, in hopes of turning him against his Utopian allies.

Pendleton's associates encourage children to write to Portman explaining how they feel about him abandoning his role as hero to "do stuff in the White House." The drawing of a child burning accompanies the most emotive letter. Simultaneously, Pendleton crafts a media campaign implying that Portman is turning his back on what he stands for to seize political power he has no idea how to use.

At any given time, legal cases involving the abuse of nova powers and the basic humanity of novas are progressing up the judicial ladder. The Supreme Court hears them only rarely and only when the correct decision is clear. In most cases, the justices prefer to avoid the issue altogether. Lauren Pendleton is not above expediting one of these cases and pressuring her appointee to have the case heard. She hopes that the court will make a ruling that directly or indirectly keeps Portman from taking office. In the default version of this scenario, none of these cases can be heard before the election, and most are not resolved for some years

afterward. However, Corby Carter's actions (see below) may cause a case to climb to the top faster than it normally would, making it possible for Pendleton to try this tactic.

If Mark Green is more dangerous than Portman, Pendleton's course is clear. She starts a media blitz, an evidence-free campaign tying Mark to all sorts of socially objectionable. He inevitably responds with indignation, painting himself as a slandered innocent; at this point, she releases the previously suppressed FBI file on his participation in the Aryan Martyrs.

Republican Party

The Schroer scandal was the catalyst that began the right-wing exodus from the Republican Party. The social conservatives and fundamentalists realized that they no longer had the GOP wrapped around their collective finger and made good on their threat to split from the fiscal conservatives to push their own, some might say extremist, agenda. While most remaining Republicans took a "good riddance" approach, the move did weaken the party — not so much because it hurt its public image, although it did, but because many already-elected Republican officials abandoned the party and took their influence with them. Moreover, by forming parties such as the American Eagles, that then clamored to become the voice of the American right wing, they left the Republicans in an awkward ideological position. Although its platform still appealed to many Americans, the Republican Party had become the party of "conservative, but not as much as those other guys." It no longer had a clear and simple message.

Candidate Bernard Morrison hopes to change all of this, with his laughing eyes and his message that Americans can "rewrite" their country. More precisely, Morrison means that by an act of will — starting with his election — America can transform itself into a place of "clean living and proper Christian kindness." When someone reminds him of Schroer, he answers, "The Republican Party was the first thing I recreated." When someone suggests his agenda is naïve, he smiles and points out, "I never said it would be easy."

Morrison is one of the great living practitioners of creative campaign financing, most specifically the various legal forms thereof. His seemingly unlimited funding and a face that just screams "elder statesman" are his greatest advantages in the race.

Bernard Morrison

Bernard Morrison, at age 22, experienced a premature midlife crisis and retreated from the world for a three week fast. On the 18th day, Morrison stopped suffering from hunger. His view of the world, until then motivated by irrational desires and the various pains of existence, stripped itself clean.

He almost forgot to start eating again, it felt so good.

Morrison came out of the experience a man essentially immune to anything the world could throw at him — a person of incisive perception, still ignorant in many ways but possessed of an extraordinarily broad perspective. Only

Option: For Conservative Characters

If the Storyteller wishes to involve characters in the political process but, at the same time, the characters are too conservative to associate with the Democrats, it's conceivable that Lauren Pendleton chooses a nova running mate. A conservative character may find Pendleton's agenda more liberal than his own, but grounds for compromise exist.

This can play out in many ways. Pendleton could choose a nova VP in reaction to the Democratic Party's move, if the Storyteller switches the dates of the National Conventions. She could inspire that move with her choice. She could simply preempt it. She could choose one of the characters or a slightly more conservative version of Portman. If the Libertarian vice-presidential candidate is the first or only nova in the race, Mark Green would direct his venom in that direction instead — even compared to Portman, a party with an incumbent President and nova appeal is the prime threat to everyone else's campaign.

his knowledge of the billions of people who tangle themselves up in irrational desires and the self-fulfilling idea that pain can touch them still bothers him.

Morrison's purity of intent does not always translate into purity of action. He feels no great obligation to become a paragon of virtue. He happily stomps his enemies into the ground. He engages in political manipulations, financial manipulations and minor vices because he finds them interesting. What he lacks is spite. When he takes offensive action, he does so with compassion and occasional mild regret.

Morrison sums up his fundamental plan for the nation as follows: "Christianity itself should remain divorced from the processes of government. The moral and ethical guidelines developed under its aegis, however, provide suitable guidelines for policy and law. I want to see a federal government and a people with just such policies." Once, after a pause, he added, "Doing lip service to them as the American Eagles recommend would, at least, be a start."

Morrison paints Impressionist works in his occasional moments of free time. He has a wife, Maheshvari, and two sons. (A reporter once questioned him regarding the propriety of taking a foreign wife; with compassion, regret and a barbed tongue, Morrison methodically reduced the man to tears.) Morrison's choice for Vice-President is Abraham Dempster, until recently the Pan-American Airlines CEO.

Active Intentions

The centerpiece of Bernard Morrison's campaign is his "Statement of Principles," a simple, apolitical and meditative look at the things he stands for, which he intends to have pasted on as many walls and doorways as possible. He refuses to campaign on the basis of complex issues, reasoning that anyone capable of understanding the issues reads the campaign platforms anyway. He does not seek verbal slugfests and usually avoids dirt slinging — although he can hold his own in either activity when necessary. Rather, he feels that if America comes to know him and what a Morrison Presidency means, America will put him into office. Pursuant to this goal, the obligatory cable commercials feature clips of speeches and the occasional 30-second unrehearsed interview. This last captures attention by virtue of its novelty despite the commercials' lack of polish. Perhaps one in six commercials instead feature light mockery of another candidate.

Morrison considers strategy unnecessary when dealing with Portman's candidacy. First, Morrison finds the idea of electing an inexperienced nova on the basis of his fame ridiculous and trusts America not to do so. Second, on a personal level, Morrison rather likes The Fireman — and

Candidate Profile: Bernard Morrison

Date of Birth: 1/29/1944

Place of Origin: Tucson, AZ

Political Experience: A four term Arizona Senator

Strengths: Morrison boasts a distinguished appearance, including silver hair and a patrician nose. His long career as a successful crusader for intellectual-property rights and his Senatorial experience improve public confidence. He doesn't take himself as seriously as the other candidates take themselves, both an advantage and a liability.

Weaknesses: Morrison suffers from phlebitis, an inflammation of several veins, which can have potentially dangerous complications. He also suffers from "inexplicable enrichment" — a condition first diagnosed in Mexico — in which politicians mysteriously acquire money during their terms in office.

Notable Quotes:

"The concept of welfare is sound. I only wish to contain its abuses."

"Why am I afraid of Project Utopia? My dear, they don't trust us to run our own lives."

Ambushed by reporters outside his hotel room, regarding the Joe Vichars case:

"Of course I believe in capital punishment. Mustn't we must keep reporters off the streets?"

Platform Summary, by issue

Affirmative Action: Conservative

Capital Punishment: Conservative

Crime: Conservative/Moderate

Education: Conservative/Moderate

Gay Rights: Moderate

Health Care: Moderate

Military: Conservative

Project Utopia: Conservative

Religion: V. Conservative

Taxes: Conservative/Moderate

Welfare: Moderate



does not want to work so hard keeping the nova out of the Oval Office that someone like Mark Green gets in.

Morrison knows that defeating President Pendleton requires an uphill struggle no matter what tack he takes. She has the same major advantages he does (money and respectability) and more of them. He believes he knows her weakness, however. Although she has many virtues as President, Pendleton's campaign revolves around her ideology — not her character, not her effectiveness and not her record. Morrison's researchers, therefore, pull up every case they can where "big government" prevented a personal tragedy.

Morrison's aides build a list, many pages long, of those who went onto welfare or disability and later used that support to rally and lead significantly productive lives. They print this on a relic dot matrix printer from his senatorial office, producing a sheaf of connected pages that Morrison likes to unfurl dramatically from his hand. Similarly, he can name every country that suffered historically from insufficient military preparedness and many famous figures that emerged from the public school system.

Bernard foresees only ugliness from fighting Green on a personal level. Should Green take a significant lead, Bernard instead moves to undermine Green's message. Morrison's commercials suggest that America does not need to go back to the "good old days" but, rather, forward into a new kind of greatness. Morrison takes a different tack in personal appearances, commenting, "The American struggle for national sovereignty reminds me of the Tin Woodsman's quest for his heart. After the elections, no matter who wins, we will discover that we had it all along."

Raphaela Moore

Raphaela Moore, an independent nova, approaches Morrison mid-campaign. (This comes after her appearance in Mark Green's schemes.) She offers him her services as an experienced press secretary and a "psychological body-guard" — someone to protect him from novas with superhuman social abilities. She explains that she has no small ability in this field herself, and he agrees to hire her. Naturally, this position offers unlimited opportunities to manipulate Morrison. Moore intends to make sure he wins and then exploit his position to push through her own social agenda.

Raphaela Moore's natural face is well known. A talented actress, she has appeared often on the big screen. Using the Appearance Alteration enhancement, however, she is able to keep her identity reasonably private, and wears the name Susan Lindley when acting as Morrison's press secretary.

Agenda

Moore sees the potential for great personal enrichment in a pet President. Just staying near him, after the election, would give her the opportunity to make contact with military, political and financial leaders around the world — putting many of them, she hopes, under her spell.

Moore also wants control over a President in order to push the following ideas through the system. First, a strong

focus on education. She believes that an improved system of public education would lead inevitably to a better world. Second, she wants as much money as the government can possibly spare redirected into the space program; she considers expansion of humanity into the solar system and the galaxy a vital necessity. Third, she feels a great anger toward Utopia, based on its "kidnapping" her shortly after eruption and dosing her with mox until she could control her abilities. She wants the US to disassociate completely from Utopia and perhaps even take hostile action against the Project.

She may wish to punish Portman for rejecting her (see the American Eagle Party subsection). If not, Moore's agenda does not require taking action against the characters. Storytellers should give the characters a few opportunities to notice her participation in Morrison's campaign or her sudden disappearance from her old haunts. If they do not notice, or decide they do not care, eventually the consequences of a Moore-assisted candidate or a Moore-controlled President should come around.

Removing Obstacles

Moore uses a rather blunt standard operating procedure when feeling threatened. If she can identify her opponents or make a good guess at their identities, she makes the rounds of all the local authorities, from the IRS to the Team Tomorrow hotline, twisting them into going after her enemy. She may apply a simple "disguise" first. Although subterfuge and persuasion are not her greatest strengths, she can still make the most brilliant baseline actors look like kids in an elementary school play. She therefore drowns characters in an audit, an attempted deportation, attempted arrests on five different grounds by five different agencies, picket lines formed by every major local union, a phone siege by irate mothers concerned about the evils of roleplaying games, solicitors from every fringe religion following up on the characters' conversion, obsessed fans certain that one of the characters is actually Elvis and so forth. Pressed hard enough, all of these groups admit they have nothing more than a general hunch and vague suspicions to go on, but they can make the characters' lives interesting for a short time — assuming that Raphaella identifies the characters as her antagonists and then has time to make the necessary calls.

If Moore cannot identify her opponents, even drawing on Morrison's resources, she probably drops out of sight. She may leave a stand-in behind to draw her enemies' fire — e.g. convincing a close look-alike how amazingly fun it would be to borrow the identity of the Republican candidate's press secretary while she goes on a "secret covert mission."

Corby Carter (A Faction All His Own)

Corby Carter describes his life as "an open book." That book, in particular, would be *Principles for an Ethical Society*, released by Corb Publications in 2006. Within its pages,



Carter lays out his argument that human cruelty and indifference are the only significant evils remaining in the world. He describes his vision of a social order that overcomes these ills, a collection of interrelated laws and mores built around principles of loyalty, discipline, structure and accountability. He also summarizes the sociological manipulations necessary to sweep away the old order and establish his vision, albeit in a rather complicated mathematical notation.

In the introduction, Carter admits freely that he built his ideas on the "feeble and inept ethical concepts [he] developed as an intellectually limited baseline." His former associates describe him as a shallow wimp, a petty dictator and a man whose fear of confrontations turned him into a two-faced, passive-aggressive weasel. Hardly anyone cares about that any more, however. Even the disgruntled ex-employee who tried to drown Carter in the executive-washroom sink — triggering his eruption — long since bought into the cult of Corby and now works as his lab assistant.

Carter joined up with Utopia shortly after his eruption. He understands the importance of backers and public relations. More than that: while he could develop his sociological theories by pure cognition, some of his goals require actual technology.

"Genetic manipulation is the most frightening of all sciences," Corby writes. "Once we control the building blocks of human nature, only two possibilities exist: Humanity begins the ascent to godhood, or humanity descends into eternal stagnation. If ethical individuals do not apply this technology to reinforce an ethical society, random elements will disrupt that culture while amoral nations become stronger and purer in their dark natures."

Principles for an Ethical Society

Carter's plan for a perfect society, as laid out in his book, requires a certain amount of human suffering. In this

respect, it may seem foolish to publish his scheme, even in abstract notation that few others could read. His purpose in doing so is simple. The patterns of mathematics laid out in the relevant sections of his book do not simply illustrate his conclusions and thought process; they represent a careful, inexorable, almost hypnotic attempt to "sell" anyone capable of understanding his ideas on those ideas' value. Carter is not just an egghead; he's a salesman of nova caliber, and he wants all the mega-brains on his side that he can get.

There's also a second message, layered in, obscure enough that he believes only someone smarter than he is could decipher it. In English, it reads, "I know I am as a child to you. Before you attempt to interfere, please remember that the mass of humanity is much less than a child to you. You may grow lonely for my company in time."

Carter, too, suspects the existence of sphinxes.

Active Intentions

Corby intends to start his conversion of the world in America. His plan, in simple terms, runs as follows:

Field-test his planned community.

Undermine the American judicial system. His first step is to con judges across the nation into idiotic decisions. Inhumanly devious and persuasive, Carter is able to sway a judge with just a casual conversation; it takes only a word or two to sow the seeds of each decision. Second, start a grass-roots movement to require judges and DAs to take into "proper consideration" all relevant crimes and precedents and permit civil lawsuits against those who do not. Third, build the movement's power with staged exposure of idiotic judicial decisions. Congressmen and Senators wishing election will bargain with this movement's representatives, if it becomes popular enough. Fourth, keep the President from interfering. Finally, watch the American courts grind to a halt after an appropriate law's passage.

Encourage the spread of groups defined both by tight loyalty and ugly behavior. As the paralyzed judicial system allows more vicious hate criminals, gangs and so forth to roam the streets, the public must seek a self-defense system. Use the proper media and community positioning to make the logical recourse Carter's own form of strength through numbers — a "benign fascism."

After a sufficient period of legal paralysis, introduce "the new code" into the House as a replacement for the laws that came before. This is the simplified code of law Carter developed based upon his personal sociological principles.

Personality Profile

Carter comes from an upper-class family and possesses all the concomitant manners. He's a risk seeker by nature; he develops sheaves of contingency plans not out of fear but from basic obsession with his work. He considers it his personal duty to fix the world. He copes terribly with failure and rejection alike, although few reject him these days — in fact, he has an active cult following. In his

introspective moments, he admits that the cruelty and indifference he projects on global society is just that, a projection: He feels, in the deep places of his soul, that these are his faults.

Carter displays extroverted, narcissistic, aggressive, sadistic and cold behavior patterns. In a lot of ways, every action he takes is "showing off," even actions designed to conceal his identity. He suppresses the sadistic elements of his personality and conceals his cold heart but sees nothing wrong with aggression and narcissism. After all, in his own mind, he is Corby Carter, nova, genius and demigod.

Removing Obstacles

If the characters seem likely to cause trouble for Carter, he attempts to remove them. Similarly, he plans to take aggressive action against Portman, who suspects Carter of unethical activity, before Portman acts against him. Some of Carter's favored methods follow.

It is common knowledge that novas sometimes display mental aberrations. The United States has laws that allow the police to apprehend individuals suspected of being a danger to themselves or others due to a psychiatric condition and take them to a hospital where a doctor can evaluate them. Carter can arrange such an intervention, making sure the officers that knock on a character's door (or on several characters' doors) watch for the known personal habits and mannerisms of the character as signs of the alleged condition. A sufficiently alert character might figure this out from the officers' body language.

If a character refuses to go in, the situation escalates, potentially to the point of arrest. Once a character is comfortably detained in a private D.C. facility, Corby Carter, M.D., pays a visit as a special consultant. His opinion, as a consultant, cannot hold a character in a hospital. He can, however, push characters, using research into their pasts and personal manipulative skill, into acts indicative of psychosis or uncontrolled violence. The fact that only Carter's words confuse the characters reality means nothing unless proven.

Carter does not consider terror tactics beneath him. Normally, he does not hurt innocents unnecessarily — but each failure causes him to escalate either the risk or the brutality of his methods. If acting against the characters, he hires an incendiary expert to destroy a family member's empty house; leaves a vial of soma on a character's doorstep; sends an analysis of the flaws in presidential security to a character's residence, along with several photocopied pages from the testimony of serial killer Dennis Nilsen and continues in this vein. Another tactic Carter may use is breaking into a character's OpNet accounts to plant a consistent series of fictitious but incriminating communications between the character and some well-known criminal. In either case, he would ensure that the character discovers the result, not the police. Significant escalations in terms of brutality include arranging direct accusations for terrible crimes and placing hit orders on a character's college friends — who most likely do not receive police protection even in the face of Carter's earlier actions.

Fear is only one key human motivator. Carter considers sexual attraction and loyalty the other two — and loyalty is Carter's favorite emotion. He has three simple options if he chooses to exploit the characters' loyalties. One is to find blackmail information regarding a close associate of a character and attaching it to the shells of protection surrounding Carter's secrets. Anyone trying to trace his activities using bureaucratic or electronic channels must stop or risk having the software or lawyers release this information automatically. Another approach Carter may take is to associate Clytemnestra, his OpNet identity, firmly with the characters' allegiance in the mind of the public. This involves not just vocal support of that allegiance but convincing its public detractors into making the connection. In that event, revealing Carter's less savory plans will stain the reputation of something the characters value. The third method is to become literally and genuinely invaluable to that allegiance. This could involve feeding information and insight from Utopia or Utopia's files on its enemies to a character's ally.

Sexual attraction is the final motivator and tool on Carter's list. Carter can build a relationship with an unattached female nova without unusual difficulty, starting with a coincidental encounter. Politics, however, could make this impractical. Worse, she might turn on him when she realized that the entire relationship was an artifice.

Carter has a small but devoted cult following that allows him a great deal of freedom to manipulate characters through sexual means indirectly. He does not enter into a relationship himself but rather finds a "Corbite" of the right mindset and intellect (minimal or vast, depending) — reshaping him or her in his lab to the nova's vision of one character's perfect mate. Carter can even include a genetic predisposition toward behaviors that seem appropriate. This gives him an opportunity to tie a character to someone who becomes heartbrokenly outraged if the character takes action against Carter.

The characters are not an integral part of Carter's agenda. In most versions of this story, he has reason to deal with them. In others, he does not. When not acting against Portman and the characters, he simply proceeds with his long-term plans. If the characters are not involved in his scuffle with The Fireman, Storytellers can have his name cross the characters' path once or twice during their dealings with Portman, Green, the Dominoes or the Senate Committee on Nova Affairs. This ensures that his later actions catch the characters' attention.

The Dominoes (An Apolitical Faction)

Portman would categorize Marietta Jackson as a sphinx destined for transcendence. She works as a bartender in Garza Bay, Costa Rica, but every motion of her body, every word she speaks and every plan she makes is a purely subconscious reaction to her environment. Her conscious mind wandered off long ago into abstract realms of

number theory and linguistics, and it's not planning to return until it can drag its body into those realms with it.

Jackson's subconscious has deduced Portman's interest in novas like her, classified it as a mild threat and begun to enact countermeasures.

Her tools are the Dominoes. This small group of novas shares an allegiance to an organization generally opposed to the characters', ideally one with an interest in protecting America. For example, if the characters work for the Directive, the Dominoes might be Utopian agents. If the characters are Utopian, the Dominoes might work for the Directive. The name "Dominoes" can be a code name or a nickname, as appropriate.

The Dominoes, regardless of allegiance, developed a habit of consulting Jackson for semi-oracular advice and the best drinks this side of Hong Kong. This lets her aim them at Portman if they had no previous interest in him. If their organization would have reason to investigate the charges brought before the Senate Committee on Nova Affairs, then she has an opportunity to prejudice them against Portman and his allies. Either way, they feel confident that Portman — and the characters, if they work for him — is a threat.

As an alternative, if the characters play the part of aggressive investigators, the Dominoes can be their targets. If the characters investigate Portman and others, based on the committee debates, the Dominoes can be secondary suspects. If the characters seek answers regarding Slider's death, Portman may have sketchily tied a Domino to Proteus. (This accusation should then have an element of truth. For example, the Dominoes might work for Utopia, and one of the other Dominoes works for Proteus.) If Portman converts the characters to his cause, he explains his suspicions that the Dominoes work for a sphinx. Again, Jackson would play the Dominoes against the characters to undermine Portman's position.

Characters who do not associate with Portman, investigate the journal, investigate the Slider murder or look into the idea of sphinxes do not normally come into conflict with the Dominoes. However, if the characters work for Mark Green, the Storyteller can decide that he is the threat that roused Jackson to action. Green then replaces Portman in the intrigues below. Characters can also become targets simply by virtue of Portman's or Green's desire to recruit them.

There are three or four Dominoes, depending on how many characters they square off against. A short summary of their personal style and powers follows; a fuller description comes in the *Dramatis Personae* section.

Bard Crosby is a low-powered Mega-Manipulator, who strives always to be stylish — difficult, given that he moves from body to body in the course of his work. Mary Mary Martinez, a shapeshifter, has a light, childlike attitude toward life and no conscience whatsoever. Anne Steiner considers herself a source of disorder by vocation, having a talent for undermining bureaucracies and computer systems. Finally, Reginald Daniels, burdened with the

body and face of an angel, is the optional member of the group, a watchful guardian who protects his peers.

If the Characters Investigate the Dominoes First

The Dominoes spend a few weeks in the California Bay Area, participating in the negotiations surrounding the illicit sale of banned technology to ViaSoft. They may involve themselves as legitimate facilitators, or this may be a sting operation.

Characters can trace the Dominoes to California by checking the N! online files on nova sightings, as well as with more advanced research techniques. If the characters attempt to spy on the Dominoes there, the novas — highly alert at the time — probably notice. Crosby has a sixth sense for danger; Mary Mary moonlights as furniture, plants and random bystanders; Steiner has a fourth-instar node and Daniels, if present, has inhumanly keen senses. The odds favor one of them discovering the characters' nature during even a cursory study.

Characters may, instead of spying on the Dominoes, walk up to them and strike up a conversation. Crosby, in particular, prides himself on being polite and will happily engage in small talk for a while before turning on the charm, explaining that he's very nice and noting that, really, the characters should tell him everything. It's possible that Ms. Martinez will take this opportunity to sneak into the characters' luggage as an insect and poke around.

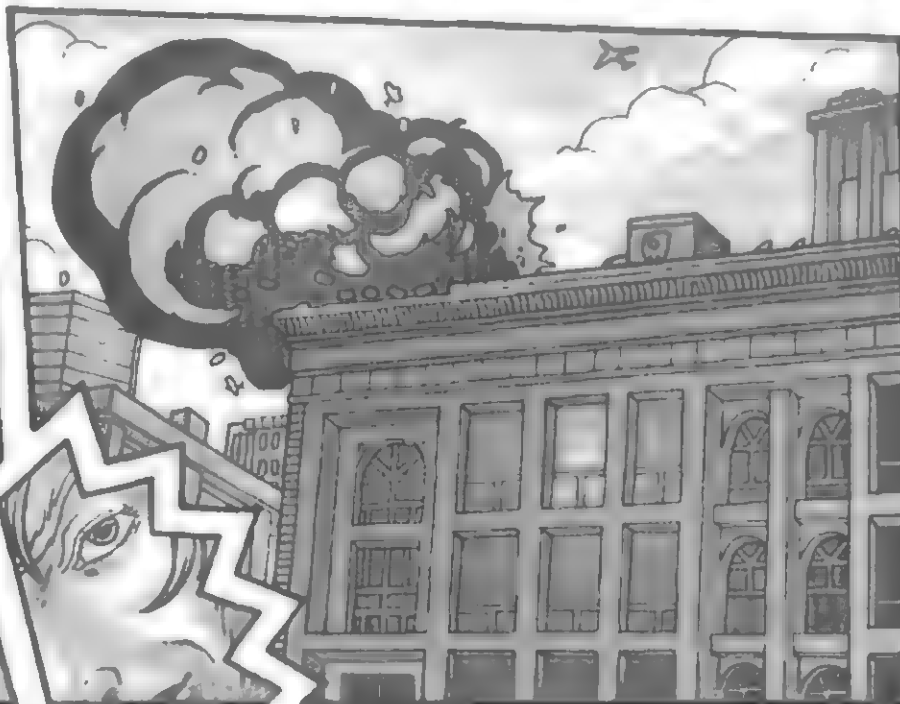
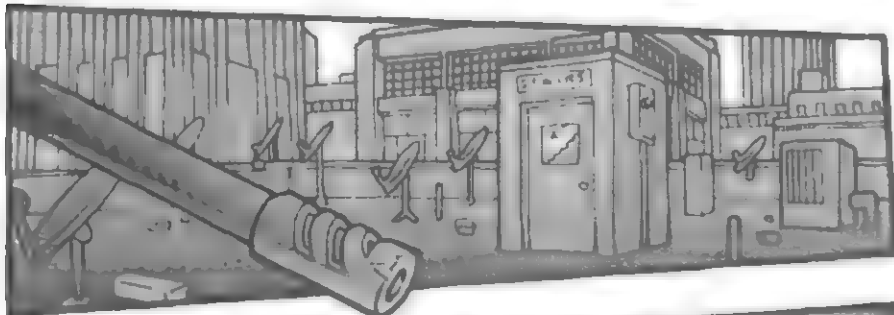
Pure computer research into the Dominoes or an individual Domino finds no information related to the Slider murder, Proteus, the Aberrants or anything else that they have no official connection to. However, with three successes on a Computer roll, the characters discover that someone has professionally elided information in the places such data might be. Four successes allows the character to notice the little alarm bells attached to most files on the Dominoes, and five allows her to keep them from going off. (The character can automatically avoid these alarms on similar records in the future.) If the characters thwart the alarm and proceed to pursue the Dominoes, allow them the advantage this gives them. If the characters nullify the alarm and then drop the matter completely, assume that Crosby's Intuition warned him of their research even without the alarm.

Ultimately, the Dominoes figure out that the characters are studying them. Research of their own gives them a hint as to why.

Active Intentions

If at some point it becomes unreasonable for the Dominoes to take action against the characters, they stop doing so. While the Dominoes consider the characters a threat, however, they pursue the following course of action.

Assuming that the characters have an affiliation with a political campaign (most likely the Democrats,) Crosby convinces another party to sign his group on as political consultants. This allows them to attend political functions



and keep the characters under observation. Crosby, Steiner and Martinez disguise themselves appropriately. Daniels, painfully conspicuous, stays out of politics and provides backup instead. The most likely group for the Dominoes to associate with is the Libertarian Party, previously free of nova influence.

Crosby contacts an associate — either a baseline attached to his larger organization or an academic contact. With permission, in the first case, and without, in the second, he spends a week trampling through her head with his manipulative and empathic abilities. In the end, this woman, Jane Mason, genuinely believes that she was an associate of the Dominoes until a few days ago, when disgust with their uglier deeds drove her to defect. She has decided to remain in their confidence, since none of them can actually read minds, and inform the Dominoes' enemies of her one-time allies' evil plans.

Mason seeks out Portman and the characters. She explains that she served with the Dominoes as a tactical consultant — she's an accredited scholar in the field of military history, which serves as a useful adjunct to Mary Mary's innate tactical genius. If pressed, she admits that she "um, became a bit complicit in some illegal stuff." For this reason, the Dominoes usually trust her during the kicking-around-ideas phase of an operation. She does not participate in every decision by any means or the detailed planning sessions — but she does hear a lot if she does not

pry. It was cool and dangerous at first to hang with these novas, but now the body hopper, the angel who kills like blood was a sacrament, the girl who can't stay in one shape from one minute to the next and Anne Steiner, Ms. Living Embodiment of Disorder, are really beginning to creep Mason out. She wants out on a permanent basis, without having to testify against them, and so, she's offering to sell them out to the characters, their current antagonists. She brings information on two Domino plots that foreknowledge might help prevent and offers to courier more if necessary. Her story checks out under the quantum probing of telepathic and Mega-Social characters, unless the telepath or socialite is very skilled.

The Dominoes intend to feed the characters information through Mason until she has established her credibility. Then they plan to activate a deeply buried aspect of her conditioning and use that information pipeline against the characters. If the Dominoes do not have legitimate authority, they arrange things so that the characters finish this series of events apparently complicit in the criminal activities Mason helps them stop. If they have such authority, they hope to establish or disprove the characters' conspiratorial *bona fides*.

Opening Moves

The first Domino move takes the form of an information dig in computerized records. The Dominoes discuss this and the following move in the presence of the "re-

formed" Mason; she then leaves to betray the Dominoes for the first time. Anne Steiner starts the dig approximately 15 minutes before the estimated time Mason will reach the characters, given traffic patterns, the doorman's probable asking price and similar factors. Steiner believes she can get enough information to make the dig worthwhile before Jane warns the characters, while leaving enough secrets buried that Jane's information helps the characters.

The second Domino action has more blood in it. (The Dominoes have to explain away Mason's sudden decision to betray them, after all.) It takes the form of "testing the characters' defenses" — arranging an assassination attempt against the characters or Portman. This takes the form of a simple sniper attack; according to Mason, the Dominoes plan to obtain a flechette rifle and set up somewhere on their target's official schedule. The more detailed plan, which Mason does not know, works as follows: A mechanized tripod is set up in a hotel room or on a roof, with a high-end rifle attached (whether it's a flechette depends on their backers' resources), as well as a computer hookup, a small sensor array and a rather large explosive. Steiner intends to keep her quantum consciousness "located" in this setup as often as she can, so she can aim the rifle but — far more importantly — trigger the explosive when the characters or the Secret Service find the rifle. The Dominoes should carry out this entire plan as soon as possible after Mason's admission of its existence. Relatively benign Dominoes arrange the explosion in a more or less empty building. They may even short it out so that only the traceable components (and not a group of Secret Service agents) go up in flames.

Some versions of the Dominoes set this up simply to evaluate the characters' methodology. Others, acting without official support, set this up to tie the characters to the property damage and possible loss of life the bomb causes. Whether the characters dash off to a hotel room and it explodes or they send the Secret Service there and an agent gets killed, the event can later blacken the characters' reputation in official eyes.

Midgame

If the characters let Mason return to the Dominoes to get more information, the Dominoes' general plan continues. Mason tells the characters about a move planned on their bank accounts and possibly Portman's campaign coffers, scheduled for the following morning. Steiner has a cryptological key to the institutions where those accounts are held, good for the following day around 8 in the morning. (She gives herself elbowroom to get all the appropriate keys in time for a coordinated operation.) If the characters move their accounts, then, at 8:06 A.M., the relevant bank systems crash. If the characters do nothing, Steiner either slices away their money or allows the bank computers to lock her out in the process of making off with the characters' accounts, (depending on how legitimate she feels like being). Either way, she tries to copy all appropriate financial records, so she can trace expenditures. If the characters set a trap, play out events accordingly.

If the Dominoes initiated the conflict with the characters, either because they consider the characters dangerous or for another reason, the fourth step is to flush out their contacts. This means forcing the characters to communicate with their major allies.

Mason overhears a discussion of "what sounds like a really ugly operation," one the Dominoes' plan to undertake. Crosby subtly pushes her into taking a risk — making off with a doodle he drew on a napkin while discussing it. This complex scribble of cryptic abbreviations and requisitions includes a double-underlined notation of the characters' allegiance.

From all indications, it looks like the Dominoes intend to commit a bloody massacre targeting the characters' base of operations. Almost any investigation turns up a recent terrorist boast that that location (T2M Americas headquarters, the Portman campaign office, a major Directive building, the law agency of the characters' attorney or what-not) will fry in 48 hours.

The abbreviations on the napkin have been chosen very carefully — each one, from nine to 13 characters in length, is invariant under several major encryption schemes. That is, regardless of where it appears in an encrypted message, each takes one of only a handful of forms. The Dominoes intend to track any messages the characters and others send through the OpNet on the matter, as well as phone calls and mail leaving their residence.

As for the terrorist attack itself, it probably peters out — Crosby anonymously persuades a well-armed terrorist cell, serving some completely unrelated cause, to make the attack without sufficient preparation. This results in the elimination of said cell. The Dominoes do not weep for it. Again, a link tying the characters to something inappropriate has been drawn.

Endgame

The Dominoes activate the second part of Mason's conditioning.

If the Dominoes do not represent any official authority, they call the FBI (and thus the Directive) or Utopia, using Steiner's abilities or espionage technology to make tracing the call difficult. Mary Mary adopts the voice of one of the characters and explains that she represents "the Astolat," responsible for the bomb, the bank crash and, indirectly, the terrorist attack — anything bad but previously untraceable that happened in the execution of the plans above. She requests a meeting for the next day so that she can discuss demands, and she assures the agents that there will be "no tricks." She also calls the media and arranges for their covert presence on the scene. Investigating agents of the FBI, Directive or Utopia assume that the media presence explains the sheer stupidity of giving the authorities a day to prepare — the terrorist expects to get captured and have a chance to take credit for events on film. They prepare to cover the whole area and make escape impossible regardless.

Mason goes to the characters and explains that the Dominoes will be meeting an important baseline backer at

that time and place. She's not entirely sure what's up, but bets that tracing a baseline is easier than tracking a Domino. Afterward, close to the time of the meeting, she goes to the appropriate authorities and announces that she's witnessed the characters' complicity in all the above acts. She's been seen in their company or building, almost certainly, but more proof is necessary. That proof turns up when the characters drop by the meeting or Mary Mary shows up in a character's shape just long enough to "spot" the Directive or Utopian preparations and scam. She may even leave behind something Mason smuggled from the characters' room, if she had a chance to do this after the Dominoes activated her secondary conditioning. (Mason takes steps to leave no fingerprints.)

If the Dominoes do represent an organization with legitimate power, e.g. Utopia or the Directive, they handle this case themselves. They intend the characters' reaction, when trapped, discredited and then accused of criminal conspiracy, to help the Dominoes agency make the final determination regarding the characters' genuine participation in such activities. The Dominoes have read public records about the characters, traced the characters' contacts and studied the characters' reactions in several violent situations. If the Dominoes can bring the characters in, the Dominoes separate and then interrogate the characters in an attempt to extract confessions. If a nova of poor character is actually working with the characters, as discussed in the Practical Journal Management sidebar, he, of course, sells them out. ("They said they'd kill me if I talked.") The characters eventually receive a copy of this confession, which probably contains elements of the truth.

Utopia or the Directive would release the characters upon determining that they had no connection to the crimes of the Astolat "terrorist group" or those suggested by Portman's journal (fraud, terrorism, treason and, if Green identifies the sphinxes with Proteus, for the murder of Jennifer Landers.) A darker version of Utopia or the Directive could call in this "favor" later.

Defensive Intentions

Crosby trained Mason to experience a very specific mix of exaltation and fear if she tries to actively set the Dominoes up. Between that, his Intuition and Mary Mary's general tactical perception, he feels confident that he can spot any traps in advance and turn them on their creator.

If directly assaulted, Dominoes associated with the Libertarian campaign hope to publicize it as a political attack. Otherwise, they vanish like the wind, communicating with Mason thenceforth by phone and drive-by snatchings to ask tactical questions.

V. Conclusion

As of November 4, someone becomes President-elect. If the characters involve themselves heavily in political campaigning, their actions determine this outcome. Otherwise, the Storyteller should go ahead and figure out whom

he wants in the Oval Office.

Some options for a dark series: Mark Green could seize the victory. Randel Portman could become President and then succumb to mental aberrations during his tenure, leading to a nova dictatorship, disenfranchised baselines attempting armed rebellion or both. Directive novas could also remove him from the picture before the campaign ends. Morrison could take the Presidency and become a helpless puppet of Raphaela Moore. President Pendleton could win the race and then suffer impeachment after the Directive botches the Geryon matter and it becomes public.

Some options for a lighter series: Mark Green could win the general election, only to have public revelation of his machinations turn the American Eagle electors against him in December. President Pendleton has a decent chance of maneuvering those electors into her pocket; she also stands a decent chance of winning the race outright. Randel Portman or a nova character could win, leading America into a bright (and possibly Utopian) future. Finally, Morrison could win and then break free of Moore's control as soon as she attempts to influence him. For example, an intelligent Utopian nova, analyzing the news, could realize that a nova was adjusting the President's actions and remove her from the picture. Morrison's agenda has severe ideological flaws, but he is a genuinely good person and could make an excellent President.

If Mark Green's frame job succeeds, the characters could wind up in a Directive or Utopian cell. The actions of the Dominoes could also put them there. Corby Carter (offering to "reform them" psychologically) or a Directive authority eventually arranges their release in exchange for assistance with a covert project.

Losing the Election

If the nova candidate loses the presidential election but manages to make a respectable showing the status quo will prevail. Some people in the US will continue to be mildly distrustful of novas, but unless the Gabriel and Slider scandals come out (see *The Scandals Come Out* page 148) nothing will really change. However, if the opposition manages to severely discredit the nova candidate, perhaps by exposing immoral or illegal actions performed by the nova or her associates, the loss of the election will have a profoundly negative impact on the perception of both novas and Project Utopia in the United States.

If the character's impact on the campaign is severely negative, perhaps resulting in the candidate's opponents uncovering evidence of murder or a connection to the Teragen, a growing minority of the American public will begin to distrust all novas and will be increasingly uncomfortable with the efforts of Project Utopia. As a result of these problems, the American Eagle Party will win the election, anti-nova prejudice will spread, and foreign novas with close ties to Project Utopia will increasingly find threats and demonstrations accompanying their visits.

If the American public's opinion of novas has already begun to fall, then the Slider and Gabriel (see Chapter

Three) scandals will significantly accelerate this process. Reactionary hate groups will see these scandals as further proof of the danger and duplicity of novas. During the following year, novas in the most conservative portions of the nation will have increasing difficulty finding and keeping jobs. While the majority of the public will still enjoy watching *N!*, some viewers will become increasingly interested in watching scandals and crimes involving novas, and the programming will reflect this.

Anti-nova religious organizations like the Oregon-based Normal Families Coalition and The Church of Michael Archangel will gain members, and public support for Project Utopia (and novas in general) will decline. The close connection between Project Utopia and the United Nations will also serve to fuel a growing anti-UN sentiment. While the US will not withdraw from the UN, the government will be increasingly reluctant to fund projects that have a strong Project Utopia presence. Unless the characters find some way to reduce the public's distrust of novas, the US will also become increasingly isolationist. As this process continues, the American Eagle Party will become more vocal. They will even begin to gather support for various laws requiring that novas register their location and powers with state and local governments.

As a result of the growth of the anti-nova right, a few cities and states will begin keeping increasingly detailed records on the movements and activities of their citizens. In the Southwest and parts of the South, local anti-nova measures will be enacted along with anti-violence and anti-crime measures which will restrict the privacy and civil rights of both novas and baselines. The American Eagle Party's control of the federal government will slow its response to such abuses. In a few of the most bigoted and reactionary communities, open discrimination against novas will even receive official sanction.

If the characters continue to live in the United States, they will find themselves asked to join various nova-rights associations, including a few radical ones with connections to the Teragen. The characters could become nova-rights crusaders, publicly exposing bigotry and violence directed against novas and uncovering the American Eagle Party's dark secrets. Alternatively, they could become vigilantes and terrorists, determined to bring down fanatical religious leaders and repressive politicians who are attempting to turn the nation against novas. In either case, the campaign will pit the characters, who will likely be minor public figures as a result of the failed presidential campaign, against the forces of corrupt local governments and against the various right-wing militias and hate groups which support the American Eagle Party.

This type of series could provide an excellent opportunity to introduce characters who have previously opposed the Teragen to the positive side of this organization. Among its many goals, the Teragen attempts to protect the rights and freedoms of all novas. As various small but vocal groups attempt to pass anti-nova laws and to turn the public against novas, the Teragen attempts to stop this oppression. With

efforts ranging from substantial bribes and campaign contributions from figures like Count Orzaiz to vandalism and murder by vigilantes like Geryon, the Teragen will aggressively attempt to halt these fanatics' campaigns.

The characters may openly ally themselves with the Teragen. Alternatively, the characters may simply fight to expose the myriad offenses committed by various cults and hate groups and to bring the corruption within the American Eagle Party to light. Then, one day, they will discover that a number of their trusted allies and colleagues are actually members of the Teragen who have been hoping to recruit them. Perhaps the characters will join the Teragen and help liberate novas in the US, or perhaps they will uncover a terrible Teragen plot to kill the President and his cabinet. By publicly risking death to defeat such a plot, the characters may show all but the most bigoted members of the American people that both heroic and villainous novas live in their nation.

Along this same line, since the characters already possess a modicum of fame, they could attempt to show the American public the good that novas can do. An ally of one of the characters might suggest that they undertake a series of highly visible and dangerous endeavors such as stopping terrorist plots, rescuing victims of natural disasters and similar highly public and dangerous feats. By performing such actions, preferably on camera, the characters can partially help restore the American public's confidence in novas and possibly help divorce their opinion of novas from the specter of Project Utopia. Of course, to pull off this sort of campaign the characters must avoid all scandals and lead exceptionally moral lives. They must, at the very least, avoid getting caught performing any indiscretions. Mixing public heroism with an obvious but tastefully understated political agenda could allow the characters to become popular heroes even in the face of vocal anti-nova prejudice.

President Nova

Despite the general good will and media worship focused on novas, Americans often prefer to keep their media stars and politicians separate, making it unlikely that a nova character will win the election. Characters often do unlikely things, however, so the scenario may well end with a nova being elected President of the United States. If this occurs, the game will become radically different. The most important question is to whom the President owes his loyalty. This question is especially vital since, within two years of being elected, the President is going to have to face scandals relating to the events surrounding The Miracle's death or capture in his Nevada compound, an attack on the Bahrain nova facility and revelations concerning Slider's death.

Given the difficulty any nova is going to have being elected President there is going to be a substantial minority who distrust the President and who are looking for any opportunity to embarrass or discredit him. When the scandals relating to Gabriel and Slider break, the resulting grassroots backlash against Project Utopia could easily lead to a

massive loss of support, and it is likely to result in a special prosecutor being appointed to investigate the President's connection to the events in question. Allow the character's previous actions to influence this situation. A popular President has much less to fear from such scandals than an unpopular or ineffectual one. Remember that a President who openly supports the Aberrant cause once these scandals come to light might easily use this crisis as a means to solidify his position and to cause the American people to see him as a bastion against Project Utopia and their various schemes. Similarly, a President loyal to Project Utopia or Project Proteus could also have an important impact on the public's perception of Project Utopia. Before the scandals break, if the President has made a substantial effort to garner widespread popularity for herself and for Project Utopia, many citizens will dismiss or ignore any evidence of misdeed by Project Utopia as lies and propaganda.

Regardless of the President's loyalties, a dramatic rise in his popularity should only occur if the characters make a substantial effort to increase it. While there are many ways to accomplish this, the most successful way to increase popularity is through a combination of political successes, large-scale public works, expensive spectacles and personal contact. These methods have ensured the popularity of Democratic Presidents ranging from FDR to JFK. Republicans, on the other hand, have typically relied on wars and defense spending to boost their popularity.

Maintaining the popularity of a nova President, especially one with close ties to Project Utopia, will be a great deal of work and will demand much ingenuity and thought on the part of the characters. However, if the President is unusually popular, the impact of the Gabriel and Slider scandals could be minimized in the US and could, if desired, ultimately lead to a much greater degree of cooperation between the United States government and Project Utopia.

A nova President who either rejects Project Utopia or supports it and is hounded from office therefore will do a great deal to make the American public distrustful of Project Utopia's motives and actions. A President who supports Utopia and weathers the various scandals will help convince many Americans that Project Utopia is a benevolent and necessary organization that merely had a few undisciplined and overzealous employees. By interacting with the President, the characters have an unprecedented opportunity to shape public opinion and world events.

Running Presidential Scenarios.

Regardless of whether one of the characters is President or if the characters are merely the Presidents advisors, the game will take a radically different turn. Suddenly, all of the characters associated with the President are public figures. Television and OpNet interviews will become, at minimum, monthly occurrences. Privacy, especially the kind of privacy needed to engage in various illegal or otherwise dubious activities will become an especially scarce commodity. See The Price of Fame on page 148 for further details.

However, this is not to say that running a game where the characters are the President's close associates need be dull or limited in scope. Given the vast powers of any nova, the characters could go on fact-finding missions to all corners of the globe or help defeat right-wing, Teragen or Directive plots to kill the President. They might even take on difficult and complex tasks like bringing war criminals to justice or delivering immediate aid to victims of natural disasters. Being a part of the Presidents' special nova task force is in many ways quite similar to being a member of T2M, except that the characters are ultimately responsible to a single individual. Such scenarios can even work if one of the characters is actually the President.

While no previous President has taken such an active roll, no previous President could fly faster than the speed of sound or lift a tank. A President who is frequently seen carrying supplies to hurricane victims or apprehending terrorists who have threatened US citizens is likely to be incredibly popular, and many Americans will ignore scandals that might topple a less flamboyant and popular President. Americans love patriotic heroes, and a President who can personally hold back the floodwaters of a broken dam or capture hostage-taking terrorists could become a hero of truly epic proportions.

However, the Storyteller must remember that such events are still exceedingly rare even for the most active President or Cabinet members. For every day spent rescuing endangered civilians or capturing mass murderers, three or four weeks will be spent in meetings, press conferences and similar mundane political endeavors. While meetings with other powerful world leaders and the occasional tough press conference may be quite enjoyable to run, most of the events that make up the life of the President and his Cabinet members should usually be glossed over.

Dramatis Personae

Corby Carter

Corby Carter is described in detail in the Factions and Methods section.

Nature: Visionary

Allegiance: Independent / Utopia

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 3, Charisma 4

Abilities: Academics 4 (sociology), Athletics 1, Awareness 1, Bureaucracy 4, Biz 3, Command 3, Computer 4, Drive 1, Endurance 3, Engineering 5, Etiquette 3, Linguistics 3, Medicine 5, Rapport 1, Resistance 3, Stealth 1, Style 5 (seduction), Subterfuge 4

Backgrounds: Backing 4, Cipher 3, Followers 2, Influence 3, Resources 4

Quantum 2, Quantum Pool 24, Willpower 7, Taint 3

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Perception • (Electromagnetic Vi-

sion), Mega-Intelligence ••• (Engineering Prodigy, Scientific Prodigy), Mega-Appearance • (Appearance Alteration), Mega-Manipulation ••• (Trickster)

Bernard Morrison

Bernard Morrison is described in detail in the Factions and Methods section.

Important Stats: Physical Attributes 2, Intelligence and Manipulation 3, all other Attributes 4. Arts 1, Awareness 1, Biz 1, Command 3, Drive 1, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 3, Perform 3, Rapport 3, Resistance 1, Style 3, Subterfuge 3. Willpower 9.

Corinna Gilbert

Corinna Gilbert first attempted suicide at the age of 15, in the wake of romantic rejection and a corresponding collapse of self-esteem. When she was 17, with wrists crisscrossed with pale white scars, her parents finally admitted that she had a psychological problem deeper than sensitivity and sentimentality. She went into a hospital, and for all intents and purposes, that's where she stayed — sometimes in comfortable rooms with orange walls and sometimes in barren white gaols with heavy metal doors and paper clothing to keep her warm. Her bipolar disorder slowly progressed from a straightforward condition to a confused, psychotic illness — but when the manic highs hit, it all became worthwhile. In a depression, even the most comfortable wards were a hell. When she hit a high, even the locked room could not constrain her spirit; she sang, she talked to the air and she paced her cell with an energy that did not let up for half a day.

Of course, all that went away when her body reacted to a new antipsychotic by erupting. She could have the highs all the time and keep most of her judgment to boot. Deciding that a psychiatric reevaluation would take too long, she pulled a quick jailbreak and went out to stun the unsuspecting world.

Gilbert likes to play life on the edge, and her relationships and actions after the eruption all bear evidence of it. Her most dangerous relationship of all, of course, is her affair with American Eagle presidential candidate Mark Anthony Green. Green arranged a little opportunity for Gilbert to try soma, just to make sure that she didn't turn on him one day. Of course, since she likes the little extra boost to her giddy life, she hasn't worked out yet that he has her trapped.

A manic baseline has a deep well of energy. Corinna is a veritable whirlwind — and she bends time itself to create more opportunities to do the millions of things she wants to do. In fact, she bends time for all kinds of things, including reversing entropy's effects on inanimate objects to recreate destroyed items from their component parts. (This power uses the Matter Creation rules.)

Gilbert sometimes serves as Mark Green's unofficial bodyguard, keeping her distance to protect the secret of their fling. Other times, she carries out little assignments for him or helps edit videos and design commercials. She always did like art sessions, back at the hospitals, and mak-

ing belts and paintings is nothing compared to what she can do now.

Nature: Hedonist

Allegiance: American Eagle Party

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 5, Appearance 3, Manipulation 1, Charisma 4

Abilities: Academics 1, Arts 3, Athletics 5, Awareness 2, Bureaucracy 3, Drive 1, Endurance 3, Etiquette 2, Intrusion 1, Medicine 1, Perform 1, Resistance 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 1, Style 2, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Cipher 2, Node 2, Resources 1, Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 3, Taint 3

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity •• (Enhanced Movement), Mega-Wits • (Artistic Genius)

Quantum Powers: Matter Creation •, Temporal Manipulation •• (Accelerate Time, Dilate Time)

Lauren Pendleton

Lauren Pendleton is described in detail in the Factions and Methods section.

Important Stats: Intelligence and Manipulation 4, all other Attributes 3. Athletics 1, Awareness 1, Biz 2, Command 3, Computer 1, Drive 2, Etiquette 4, Intimidation 4, Investigation 1, Linguistics (French, Spanish) 2, Martial Arts 2, Perform 4, Rapport 4, Style 3, Subterfuge 4. Willpower 7.

Mark Anthony Green

Mark Green is described in detail in the Factions and Methods section.

Nature: Bravo

Allegiance: American Eagle Party

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 4, Charisma 5

Abilities: Academics 3, Awareness 2, Biz 2, Bureaucracy 3, Command 4, Drive 2, Etiquette 4, Firearms 1, Investigation 3, Linguistics 1, Rapport 4, Style 4, Subterfuge 5

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 5, Influence 4, Resources 5, Willpower 6

Green has the equivalent of five nova points — a scary baseline indeed. To make a less powerful version, reduce his Abilities by one dot each, lower his Charisma, Resources and Contacts to four and reduce his Stamina to two.

Randel Portman

Randel Portman is described in detail in the Factions and Methods section.

Nature: Caregiver

Allegiance: Democratic Party

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Appearance 2, Manipulation 3, Charisma 4

Abilities: Academics 1, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Biz 2, Brawl 1, Bureaucracy 1, Command 3, Drive 2, Endurance 4, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 1, Investigation 1, Medicine 2, Might 2, Rapport 2, Resistance 4, Style 2

Backgrounds: Attunement 5, Contacts 2, Influence 4, Node 1, Resources 4

Quantum 2, Quantum Pool 24, Willpower 7, Taint 4 (Anima Banner: Transparent Flames)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity • (Fast Tasks), Mega-Stamina ••• (Resiliency)

Quantum Powers: Absorption (Energy) •••• (Energy Magnet), Absorption (Kinetic) •, Invulnerability (Energy) ••, Force Field •*, Immolate •*, Stun Attack •*

* These abilities are based on redirecting ambient energy. He cannot use these powers unless a significant electrical, thermal or other energy source is nearby. The fixed type of energy that several of these powers require is therefore "the energy locally available."

Raphaela Moore

A long and hard study of the world led Yseult Rainusch to the conclusion that the standard human model of reality is fundamentally flawed. "Humans embrace division and difference," she argued in randomly selected OpNet forums, "from the extreme views of the sexist, racist and fundamentalist majorities — which hold that humans are easily separable into classes with obvious and important characteristics — to the nearly universal assumption that life and intelligence are inherently privileged phenomena. A more reasonable perspective holds that, since everything everywhere participates in a unified whole (Existence), you should respect even the soil. Just because God gave our spirits the gift of rational minds with which to reshape the world, we should not look down on the angelic spirits of other life or even of inanimate things."

Rainusch's views were "unaccountably" unpopular. Faced with continual rejection, she eventually descended from eccentric theorist to full-fledged ranting lunatic and firebrand. Once an advocate of respect for all things, she turned into an advocate of respect for Rainusch's opinion above all things. Before she sank any lower, her M-R node manifested.

Rainusch found her new nova state paradisiacal. Suddenly, she had no critics. She could wrap almost anyone she met around her little finger and teach them the way the world really worked. A far cry from the days when brutal OpNet users would dismiss her as a "crackpot" and a "troll!" (She got her revenge, of course, making sure that her fiercest one-time opponents fell hopelessly into unrequited love.) With matchless beauty and a new talent for social jujitsu, she cut a horrid wake through the Chicago scene and several OpNet groups alike, shattering and rebuilding relationships and toying with human emotions like they were toys and nothing more.

Then, Utopia brought her in and dosed her with mox. She wasn't "controlling" her powers, they said. She was unbalanced and needed help.

Rainusch concluded that Utopia was half-right. She had gone too far. She had shown a terrible lack of self-discipline and survival instinct. It didn't make kidnapping her and locking her up okay — but it taught her a good lesson.

She changed her name to something more glamorous

— "Raphaela Moore" — and went into show business, where she could use her abilities almost legitimately. She took care, after that, when she used her more forceful abilities, never to leave tracks.

Calling her major talent social jujitsu is not simply a metaphor. Raphaela no longer perceives social relationships in quite the same way. To her, they resemble physical objects, moving at high velocity, that a skilled nova can manipulate at will. It takes an act of will to shut down this side of herself and actually interact on a personal level.

Nature: Bravo

Allegiance: Republican Party/The Movies

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Appearance 3, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Academics 2, Arts 5, Biz 1, Bureaucracy 2, Command 5, Computer 1, Drive 1, Endurance 3, Etiquette 5, Linguistics 2, Medicine 1, Martial Arts 5, Rapport 5, Resistance 3, Stealth 2, Style 5, Subterfuge 5

Backgrounds: Cipher 4, Dormancy 2, Resources 1

Quantum 2, Quantum Pool 24, Willpower 7, Taint 0

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Intelligence • (Linguistic Genius), Mega-Appearance •• (Appearance Alteration), Mega-Manipulation •• (Persuader), Mega-Charisma •• (Natural Agitator)

Quantum Powers: Hypnosis •••

The Dominoes

Anne Steiner



Anne Steiner (born Silvia Calendri) doesn't talk about her eruption. A programmer and code breaker for the NSA, she did not become a nova when events threatened her life, her health, her friends, her loved ones or her happiness. No; the humiliation and disruption of having a virus erase her personal hard drive sent her over the edge into novahood.

She doesn't work for the NSA any more, but she still

plays the espionage game. Steiner's a holy terror when it comes to disrupting systems — any systems — and organizations — any organizations. Her colleagues claim facetiously that if she so much as looks at a chart or a business plan, it catches on fire. It's not her powers that do it; it's her personality. Orderly things ... bother her.

Nature: Rebel

Allegiance: As appropriate

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Appearance 2, Manipulation 5, Charisma 4

Abilities: Academics 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Biz 4, Bureaucracy 4, Computer 5, Drive 3, Endurance 3, Etiquette 4, Firearms 5, Intimidation 2, Intrusion 4, Investigation 3, Linguistics (Germanic, Romance, Scandinavian) 3, Martial Arts 4, Rapport 5, Resistance 3, Science 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Style 4, Subterfuge 5, Survival 1

Backgrounds: Backing 2, Cipher 5, Contacts 4, Node 3, Resources 4

Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 6, Taint 4 (Chaotic-Pattern Eyes; wears sunglasses to hide them)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Intelligence • (Analyze Weakness)

Quantum Powers: Cyberkinesis •• (Alter Data, Reprogram), Disorient •

Bard Crosby

Once upon a time, before it all got burned out, Bard had a lot of compassion in him. He valued every perspective. He considered each person unique, with wonderful insights to share. He did a lot of drugs.

One day, Bard graphically demonstrated why one should not drive under the influence of Ecstasy. Police picking through the four-car wreckage found three drivers and took the living one to the hospital. No one ever found Crosby's body.

Later, the surviving driver woke up. It wasn't until he looked into the mirror and screamed that anyone figured out exactly where Crosby had gone, and even then, the only person who knew was Crosby himself. His consciousness wove through the other driver's brain like a spider's web in dense branches. It took him quite a while to figure out how to get out again and into his own body. Even then, he did not look much like Crosby any more. He looked controlled. He looked cold. He did not have quite as much sympathy in his system because life in another brain taught him that everyone's perspective was more or less the same.

Crosby, eventually deciding that viewpoints are about as disposable as facial tissues, focused on externalities. He cultivated a sense of fashion, courtly manners, "cool." That's why he prefers covert assignments.

Nature: Gallant

Allegiance: As appropriate

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5, Appearance 4, Manipulation 5, Charisma 3

Abilities: Academics 2, Arts 1, Athletics 4, Bureaucracy 1, Computer 2, Drive 4, Endurance 3, Etiquette 3, Intrusion 3,

Linguistics 1, Martial Arts 5, Medicine 1, Melee 3, Rapport 3, Resistance 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Style 5, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Attunement 2, Backing 2, Contacts 1, Cipher 4, Resources 3

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 7, Taint 2

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Manipulation • (Persuader)

Quantum Powers: Domination •• (Parasitic Possession), Empathic Manipulation •, Intuition •••

Jane Mason

Jane Mason, a rowdy young military historian, has a bright publications record. With the exception of a rather active clubbing habit and occasional consultations with interesting people, she has no life outside academia.

Important Stats: Intelligence 4, Perception and Charisma 3, all other Attributes 2. Academics (military history) 4, Biz 1, Bureaucracy 2, Drive 1, Stealth 1, Style 1. Willpower 3.

"Mary Mary" Martinez



Ms. Martinez tends to concentrate a bit too hard; her friends used to joke that you had to say her name twice to get her attention. (The nickname "Mary Mary" stuck.) If she gets sufficiently involved in something, a herd of elephants could sneak up on her, even if they had bells on.

Mary Mary's focus is always turned toward something external; her body and mind mean nothing to her save as a lens she can use to see the world. Ever since she erupted, her body changes shape about as often as a cloudscape in a heavy wind. It's not surprising; keeping track of what she looks like requires self-awareness she just does not have.

Ms. Martinez never quite figured out how she wound up with a group of covert and sneaky deviants like the Dominoes but only because she keeps even poorer track of her mind than of her body. Mary Mary has a positive knack for crooked and underhanded schemes, and her thought processes, for all their occasional naïveté, are as twisted as a knot.

As a baseline, Mary Mary worked as a political statistician, helping apply various data to reach the conclusions a public official or candidate wanted. Until recently, she thought those days behind her.

Nature: Analyst

Allegiance: As appropriate.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Appearance 2, Manipulation 2, Charisma 2

Abilities: Academics 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Biz 2, Bureaucracy 1, Computer 1, Drive 1, Endurance 5, Investigation 3, Legerdemain 1, Martial Arts 4, Melee 1, Might 1, Rapport 2, Resistance 5, Science 3 (Mathematics), Stealth 1, Style 1

Backgrounds: Attunement 3, Backing 2, Resources 2

Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 4, Taint 3

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina ••••• (Regeneration), Mega-Intelligence •• (Tactical Prodigy)

Quantum Powers: Shapeshift ••

Reginald Daniels



Reginald Daniels always admired guardian angels — so dedicated, though unrecognized. He envied them, too — not that lack of recognition, but the fact that they could bear it so readily. He rarely received proper credit for his work and it bothered him.

If he'd known he would become a nova, that his ambition was going to shape him, transform him into the bright glowing glory from his dreams... he would have chosen a different ambition. For one thing, the wings always get in the way.

Reginald Daniels, although an angel in flesh, long ago worked out that he neither strikes with the fury of the Lord nor protects with God's clean grace. He knows that even if he chooses his cause well, he can only hope to capture a little of that purity. Still — choose a cause he has, and he

serves it with the same ruthlessness that rained fire on Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Angels," he admits, "are not always nice."

Reginald Daniels is an optional addition to the Dominoes, if the characters significantly overpower the three Dominoes above. He can also replace Mary Mary Martinez.

Nature: Martyr

Allegiance: As appropriate

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Academics 2, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 3, Computer 2, Drive 3, Endurance 3, Etiquette 2, Intimidation 1, Investigation 2, Martial Arts 4, Medicine 5, Rapport 3, Resistance 3, Stealth 3, Style 1, Subterfuge 1

Backgrounds: Attunement 3, Backing 2, Resources 2 Quantum 2, Quantum Pool 24, Willpower 7, Taint 4 (Permanent Power: Bioluminescence)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength • (Crush), Mega-Dexterity • (Catfooted), Mega-Stamina • (Adaptability), Mega-Perception • (Quantum Attunement), Mega-Wits • (Natural Empath), Mega-Appearance • (Face of Terror)
Quantum Powers: Bioluminescence •, Flight ••, Force Field •, Invisibility •, Strobe •

Serafina Matteo



At age 14, Serafina Matteo stole a schoolmate's boyfriend, whereupon her broken-hearted peer cut Serafina open with a butterfly knife. Matteo's mind died before she reached the hospital but not her body. For three years, she lay in a motionless coma in a long-term care ward. Occasionally she would respond to stimuli with a twitch or a hiss.

Corby Carter brought her out of this vegetative state, in a matter of speaking. He needed a research subject for certain psychological experiments and bargained with her parents — if they transferred custody of Matteo to Utopia and her body to his lab, he would do everything he could

to wake her. He would salvage everything he could of her old personality. He could not salvage everything, however, and that was the price — they must give up hope on the restoration of the girl they knew.

They agreed.

Carter spent three solid months on her; the new Serafina Matteo would be his child, in a way. He built one personality for her and then another and another, until finally she had dozens of specialized selves in her head, strictly ordered according to the benevolent social principles Carter advocated. For about nine months afterward, on a less intensive basis, he let her study with him, and she let him study her. Then she turned 18, and he released her.

Matteo found work with Proteus or the Directive (which one depends on Storyteller need). She rarely associates with her family; their presence disturbs and confuses her. If the Storyteller needs an extra Proteus or Directive agent to play one role or another in the plot, she can use Matteo.

Matteo's compartmentalized mind makes her an ex-

traordinarily capable baseline. Her social personalities can focus intensely on making sparkling conversation; her martial persona dedicates its full attention to battle; her seven academic selves — Carter's favorites — think purely in terms of their respective devotions. Her sudden transitions from one mind to another tend to disconcert other baselines, however.

Nature: Survivor

Allegiance: Corby Carter / Proteus or the Directive

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 2, Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Appearance 3, Manipulation 4, Charisma 4

Abilities: Academics 5, Arts 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 1, Biz 1, Bureaucracy 3, Command 2, Computer 4, Drive 2, Endurance 2, Engineering 2, Etiquette 3, Firearms 3, Intrusion 2, Investigation 3, Legendmain 2, Linguistics 2, Martial Arts 4, Medicine 3, Melee 2, Perform 1, Resistance 4, Science 3, Stealth 3, Survival 1

Backgrounds: Backing 3, Cipher 1, Contacts 2, Mentor 2, Resources 2, Willpower 8



Ethiopia. The “Breadbasket of Africa.” Once one of the poorest and most ecologically devastated nations in the world, transformed into a tropical paradise by the technology and nova personnel of Project Utopia, particularly nova ecologist Spencer “Antaeus” Balmer. Thanks to Utopia’s Operation Eden, Ethiopia is a prosperous and modern nation with bright hopes for the future. The only question is, how long can it last?

Scientists from around the world, armed with satellite-surveillance data, ecological studies and years of experience in studying ecosystems are questioning the long-term prospects for the Ethiopian terraforming project.

“We’re not saying that Operation Eden isn’t an amazing achievement in terraforming and environmental engineering,” says climatologist Sharon Isenberg of Florida State University in Tallahassee, lead author of one of two recent papers focusing on Operation Eden’s results. “We’re saying there is evidence that the environment Operation Eden created on the Ethiopian plateaus is not self-sustaining and may never be.”

University studies show a transformation of the Ethiopia ecosystem that is nothing less than astonishing. A region once plagued by lack of rainfall, soil erosion, widespread desertification and defoliation has gained rich soil, a wide variety of plant and animal life and regular rainfall.

“Unfortunately,” says Isenberg, “Operation Eden has only addressed the symptoms rather than the underlying problem.” The Ethiopian plateau requires regular maintenance from Project Utopia’s novas and environmental scientists in order to sustain its lush and life-giving condition. Novas regularly use their abilities to pulverize rock to provide soil replenishment. They bring in nitrogen-rich soil

scooped from the ocean floor to enrich the region. They provide regular rainfall by “seeding” clouds and directly manipulating the local climate. Genetically engineered plant species are introduced into the area and grown rapidly to adulthood through nova intervention. This leads scientists to wonder if Ethiopia’s new ecosystem can survive without its nova “caretakers.”

The Greening of Ethiopia: How Long Can It Last?

[from *Science*, July 24, 2008]

Maintenance of Operation Eden has also taken its toll on the novas of Project Utopia. Terraforming upkeep remains a regular duty of novas operating from Utopia headquarters in Addis Ababa, and one nova, Rafia Bhakra, lost his life in a rockslide last year while performing maintenance in the region.

“An ecosystem is remarkably complex and difficult to predict,” says Isenberg. “It’s possible Operation Eden might reverse the desertification of the Ethiopian region permanently, but it’s also just as possible that Utopia’s terraforming won’t take, just like the human body rejects an unfamiliar organ’s transplant. It’s far too early at this point for Utopia to claim complete success in this experiment.”

Representatives of Project Utopia disagree with Isenberg’s findings. “One need only look out at the transformation of the Ethiopian landscape to be convinced of the success of Operation Eden,” says Utopia spokesman and scientist Dr. Nimal Dharmasena. “What’s been achieved here is nothing short of a miracle.” Utopia officials agree that the region requires maintenance but disagree that it is a flaw. “What garden doesn’t require tilling

and weeding?" asks Dr. Dharmasena. Operation Eden director Antaeus was unavailable for comment.

— Richard Knowles

Additional Reading

"The transformation of Ethiopia is remarkable, of that there is no doubt," says Isenberg. "The question is what the long-term impact of Utopia's terraforming will be on the environment, and will their miracle become self-sustaining or remain an artificial garden, dependent on nova 'caretakers' forever?"

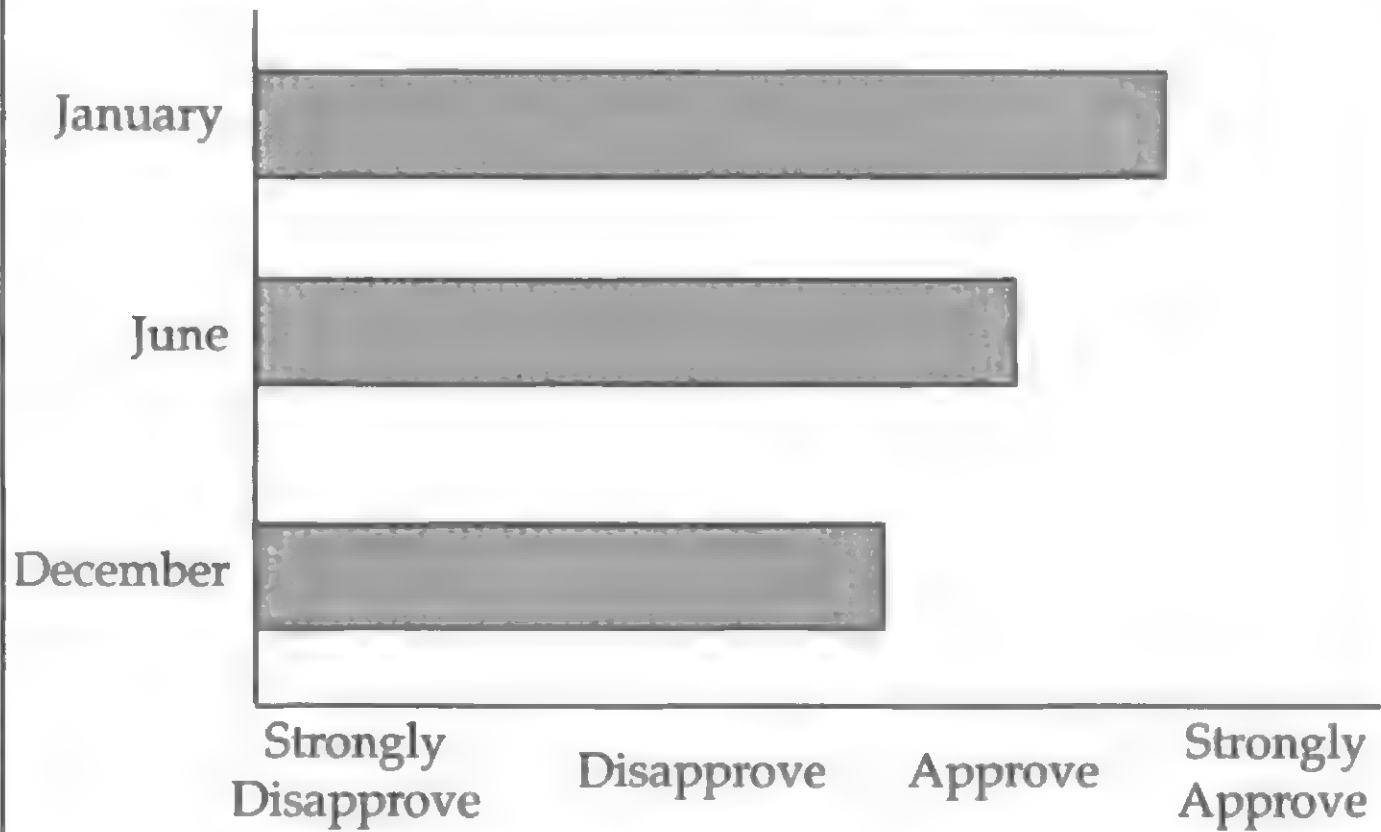
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Utopia Approval Rating Continues to Drop

August 3, 2009 — For the past year, public approval ratings of Project Utopia have continued to fall slowly, particularly in the United States, Australia and parts of Europe. This follows the scandal involving the death of Jennifer "Slider" Landers, popular member of Utopia's Team Tomorrow, and the subsequent naming of former T2M member André Corbin as the chief suspect in Slider's death. Unconfirmed reports of misuse of nova resources on the part of Project Utopia have prevented any significant recovery for the embattled organization.

"We're confident Project Utopia will weather this storm," announced a recent Project press release. "Project Utopia rests on its record of humanitarianism and hard work for the benefit of the people of the world."



U.S. Approval Ratings for Project Utopia

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Project Utopia Unveils Operation Genesis (8/7/2009)

In a press conference held today in Addis Ababa, Project Utopia spokespersons unveiled "Operation Genesis," the organization's plan to use the terraforming technology and techniques that transformed Ethiopia into a fertile paradise to do the same for the Sahara.

"The terraforming of the Sahara region will create an environment where the nations of northern Africa can thrive," said Project Utopia Director Justin J. Laragione. "We are extremely proud of our successes in Ethiopia and eager to bring what we've learned here to the rest of the world."

Antaeus, the ecological genius behind Utopia's Operation Eden also spoke regarding Operation Genesis. "This is a great challenge that lies before us, but I am certain we are equal to the task. The transformation of a landscape begins with the planting of a single tree and will continue until the Sahara is green and growing once more."

With that, the Utopian nova sank into the ground and vanished, only to reappear thousands of kilometers away in Niger, the announced home base of the new terraforming effort. In a live broadcast, Antaeus caused a fig tree to grow from the barren soil of the town of Agadez in the depths of the desert. The tree grew to maturity in a matter of moments, and the nova distributed its fruit among the grateful people of Agadez.

Project Utopia announced that work would begin on Operation Genesis immediately, although it did not announce a planned completion date for the operation.

The announcement helped to shore up flagging public opinion of Project Utopia, which has been in decline due to allegations of impropriety following the scandal related to the death of Jennifer "Slider" Landers, a member of Team Tomorrow, in Calcutta in May of 2008.



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From "The World's Opinion" segment, dated 8/7/09

What do you think of Project Utopia's Operation Genesis?

• Daniel Freiberg, environmental attorney, Seattle: "Project Utopia has the potential to reverse all the environmental damage we've done to the planet over thousands of years, if only we can get past all this other nonsense and let them get down to work."



• Xiao Liang, secretary, Hong Kong: "More land is wonderful, but I think they should devote more effort to catching that awful André Corbin before they start any new projects."

• Badou Ixa, merchant, Niger: "They say they will make all of the desert an oasis. It is a gift greater than I can imagine, to live in a place of prosperity and peace. If Allah wills it, let it be so."



• Devon McCormick, student, Ireland: "Terraforming is all well and good, but when are the minds at Utopia going to address some of the world's political problems? Right now they're just creating more land for people to fight over."

• Maria Delgato, school teacher, Mexico: "I hope they are successful, so they can help to make the whole world as beautiful a place as Ethiopia has become. God bless the novas and Utopia for their work."



Nigeria

Nigerian Government Responds to Operation Genesis (8/9/09) LAGOS, NIGERIA (AP) —

Shortly after the announcement of Project Utopia's "Operation Genesis" plan to terraform the Sahara, Nigerian President Alafin Sango ordered troops to carry out training and readiness exercises near the Nigerian/Niger border.

Neighboring Niger is where Project Utopia plans to begin its terraforming operations. The Nigerian troops reportedly include a handful of nova "elites," mercenaries commonly used in border conflicts between African nations. The Nigerian government denies that the troop movements are in any way related to Project Utopia's announcement, or their nation's previous difficulties with Utopia.

"We have a right to defend ourselves," President Sango said in an address to the nation on August, 8th, "and our forces will maintain a constant state of readiness, to keep our nation safe from any and all invaders, no matter how pleasant a mask they wear."

Spokespersons for Project Utopia had no comment to make about the Nigerian situation other than to state, "Operation Genesis is for the benefit of all nations and all humanity, regardless of our political differences. We hope everyone will support it in the spirit of cooperation and progress that Utopia was founded upon."

Transcript

OpNet conversation between Spencer "Antaeus" Balmer and Terrance Whitaker, Project Utopia manager
Dated 8/14/09

Whitaker: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me, Dr. Balmer.

Antaeus: Not at all, Mr. Whitaker, but I am very busy....

Whitaker: I won't take too much of your valuable time. I'm calling to speak to you about your report on the projected completion date for Operation Genesis.

Antaeus: Yes...?

Whitaker: The Project directors want the target date moved up from five years to two. They would like to see more substantial progress on the project within the next three months as well.

Antaeus: No.

Whitaker: I beg your pardon?

Antaeus: I think my answer is clear, sir. The Project directors want Operation Genesis accelerated. I choose not to do so. Two years is an entirely unrealistic expectation.

Whitaker: Dr. Balmer, I don't think you understand....

Antaeus: On the contrary, Mr. Whitaker, I understand perfectly. Project Utopia is feeling considerable public pressure because of recent events involving Jennifer Landers and André Corbin. Public opinion polls of the organization have been dropping. They hoped the announcement of Operation Genesis would help to improve Utopia's reputation in the public eye once again, but it hasn't done so as much as they'd hoped, so they require additional "bread and circuses" to appease the masses. They would like another "miracle" to display for the media. But my stock in trade is not miracles, Mr. Whitaker, it is science, and there are certain scientific requirements even I cannot change, even if I wanted to.

Whitaker: I'm sorry, Dr. Balmer, but the administration was very clear about their requirements for this operation.

Antaeus: Then allow me to be equally clear. You may tell the directors that, unlike them, I have the best interests of the ecosystem and this project at heart. Operation Genesis will proceed at the pace I set and no faster, or else they can begin looking for another "miracle worker." Is that clear enough for you?

Whitaker: Um, yes, perfectly.

END TRANSMISSION

Transcript

Meeting of the Project Utopia board of directors, 8/16/09

Director Laragione: Let's move on to the Operation Genesis matter. Mr. Whitaker?

Whitaker: Thank you, Director. I'm afraid we have a problem. As I said in my report, Antaeus is unwilling to meet the requirements for Operation Genesis, and he made it clear, in no uncertain terms, that he would leave Project Utopia before he would agree to the proposed timetable.

(loud murmur of voices)

Laragione: Quiet folks! Let's have some order here!

Caestus Pax: Director, let me talk with Spence, I'm sure I can get him to see things our way....

Laragione: No. If you're saying what I think you're saying, that's entirely inappropriate. There's no need to antagonize Antaeus any further; we still need his cooperation if Operation Genesis is to go forward.

Unidentified Woman 1: Do we really, Director? I mean, I understand that Antaeus is a genius in matters of ecology and his abilities greatly enhanced Operation Eden, but with what we've already learned from that project, do we *really* need Antaeus to carry out Operation Genesis?

Laragione: What are you suggesting, that we dismiss Antaeus as though he were any other employee? We can hardly afford to lose someone of his abilities.

Woman 1: Not at all, merely that we not be so dependent on him in these matters. There are many other novae in Utopia's employ, some of them brilliant scientists in their own right, others with power over rock, soil, water, plant life and other abilities suited to terraforming efforts. Luzvinda Shin is a good example of this, as is Matilda Saraband. Granted, neither of these novae approaches Dr. Balmer's understanding of ecology or raw power levels, but with training and practice, we may yet achieve spectacular results. Why not simply move ahead with the acceleration of Operation Genesis without Antaeus' blessing?

Unidentified Man 1: It has merit, Director. I agree that we have the means, and our profiling of Antaeus shows he's obsessive about his work. I think once he sees the terraforming efforts well underway, he'll be drawn back to the fold by his own enthusiasm, and he'll forget about his objections, especially if he thinks he might get left out.

Laragione: So, we do an end-run around Antaeus and push Operation Genesis forward?

(murmurs of agreement)

Laragione: Very well, but I want things handled *quietly*, behind the scenes. Keep Spence occupied and involved with his end of things while we move operations forward. I want a specialist to evaluate Antaeus' reactions and possible response to this situation, as well. Pax, do you think you can keep Antaeus in line?

Pax: (pauses) Yes, of course.

Laragione: Good. I want preliminary reports on my desk as soon as possible. Let's move on...

From: Dr. Piers Holzman

To: Director Laragione

Re: Psychological evaluation of "Subject A"

After a complete review of all available interviews, profiles and other information regarding "Subject A," I believe I can draw the following conclusions regarding the subject's psyche and mental health:

- Subject A is highly intelligent and creative, off conventional scales of IQ measurement altogether. He is highly articulate and educated on a wide variety of topics. Although capable of great leaps of logic and deduction, the subject displays limited social skills in interactive environments. His extraordinary intellect leads to behavior such as isolation, since the subject likely feels he has no intellectual equals. This isolation further leads to stunted social skills and introspection, reinforcing the pattern of behavior.

- Subject A's ability to "commune with nature" gives a strong empathy for animals, plants and other non-human life forms. Since this empathy does not apparently extend to interaction with people, I would speculate the Subject has transferred the majority of his normal emotional attachments from human social relationships to feelings for the environment.

This is in keeping with his background as an environmentalist and activist.

- Subject A's "geo-carapace" gives him a very distinctive appearance, similar to the plants and environment he empathizes with. It shields him from direct human contact, and the subject tends to shy away from this type of contact in general. His carapace is a physical manifestation of the social and psychological "shell" the subject maintains around himself.

- Subject A prefers to work in bio-laboratory environments with little or no human contact. The subject also works almost constantly, and none of his co-workers and associates are aware of what, if anything, he does to relax or spend his off-hours. Indeed, most of the subject's associates were unaware Subject A even *had* any "time off." They saw him as more machine-like than human or like he was more a force of nature than a fellow human being.

Conclusions: It is quite clear to me that Subject A is displaying symptoms of a serious disassociative disorder. The extreme differences—both physiological and psychological—between Subject A and "baseline" humans have caused him to distance himself from all normal social relationships and prevent him from forming emotional bonds with others. These symptoms are already quite pronounced, and in my professional opinion, they will only continue unless the subject's pattern of behavior is altered in some way. This could lead to the subject becoming entirely sociopathic, unable to attach emotional significance to any action.

Recommendations: Subject A needs social contact and the establishment of emotional connections with other people. I recommend regular social contact with co-workers and associates, along with the encouragement of social relationships outside the workplace. I also renew my request for a personal interview with the subject and the possibility of scheduled therapy sessions.

Respectfully submitted,
Piers Holzman, MD

E-mail

From: <address_suppressed>

Subject: (no subject)

Well, as suspected, Utopia has stepped up Operation Genesis in the Sahara. They're devoting a considerable number of novas to the effort and working them pretty hard to get things moving in Niger as quickly as possible. The funny thing is, there has been little sign of Antaeus during all this work. You'd think he'd be at the forefront, directing things like he did in Ethiopia. Rumors about him being out of favor with the powers that be at Utopia might well be true.

One thing is for certain, Utopia is pouring a great deal of effort into Operation Genesis, which means they're spreading themselves thin. They're convinced that pulling off another Ethiopia will win back public support and take people's minds off the Slider scandal. There's a hint of desperation in the whole thing, and that's a good thing for us.

If Utopia is spread thin trying to push through Operation Genesis, that means people are going to start making mistakes, maybe even slipping up enough to give us a shot at whoever is operating on the inside of the Project, pulling the strings. At the very least, it gives us a chance to start making contact with some of the other novas outside of Utopia's ever-watchful eye, maybe even win a few more over to our side. If we can do it quietly (that means NO abductions and NO quantum battles!) then Utopia will never even know we were there.

I'd suggest you start sending some people you can trust into Niger, maybe through Lagos in Nigeria. Get the lay of the land, and start finding out which novas are operating where. I'll pass along what information I can dig up on Utopia's duty assignments and other operational plans and pass it along as soon as possible. We've got a golden opportunity here, let's not blow it.

One other thing. Maybe we should think about trying to get in touch with Antaeus. I know he usually toes the Utopia party line, but it seems like he's out of the loop lately. Maybe his lack of recent appearances shows some dissatisfaction with how Utopia is handling Genesis. It might be the first signs of some sort of rift between him and Utopia. If it is, we MIGHT be able to get him to listen to our side of things. Having Antaeus on our side certainly couldn't hurt.

— Renaissance Man

TOP SECRET

From: A. Ganz
 To: Director Harris
 Re: Operation Genesis
 Director,

Surveillance on Utopia operations in the Sahara region confirm an increase in nova activity over that recorded for Operation Eden, supporting the theory that Utopia is pressing ahead with the Sahara terraforming project more quickly than in Ethiopia. This is despite less involvement on the part of Dr. Spencer Balmer, Utopia's foremost ecologist.

Of note are the numbers of novas being moved in and out of the Sahara operation in Niger. With the urgency Utopia is devoting to the project, it's clear that even the legendary nova stamina has its limits. Some novas are being taken off work assignments and moved to other locations. Although we have not been able to determine where for certain, the Rashoud facility in Bahrain appears a likely candidate.

I can confirm that Alafin Sango is not at all pleased with Utopia's operations so close to the Nigerian border and that Nigerian troops along the Niger/Nigerian border remain on almost constant alert. Sango's past relations with Utopia and his own paranoia make it likely that he believes Operation Genesis is merely a smokescreen for covert Utopia operations against Nigeria. While we have not entirely ruled out that possibility, I feel it is highly unlikely.

Still, Sango's fears may be something we can turn to our advantage. He has been most cooperative so far, in hopes of gathering allies to help him in the event that Utopia decides to move against him. So far, there has been no evidence that Utopia arranged Sango's rise to power in order to manufacture a "bad guy" in northern Africa, but investigation is still underway.

I recommend we maintain surveillance on Operation Genesis and follow up on irregularities in the nova duty shifts, while keeping Sango at arm's length and protecting our good relations with the Nigerian government.

Begin Proteus Communiqué

Double-encrypted with Navaho Daedalus 3

To: All agents

From: Director Thetis

Agents will immediately begin to concentrate their efforts on identifying and containing accelerated mutations and unusual behavior among the novas assigned to Operation Genesis. In keeping with previous findings, novas assigned to the terraforming project are becoming prone to these effects due to the near-constant exercise of their quantum abilities. Although safety measures have been put in place through Utopia management, projections still show an increased risk. Handlers will maintain especially close watch over their nova charges for any signs of unusual behavior or physical symptoms.

Containment protocols apply to any affected nova, in order to preserve Project security. Compromised novas are to be handled with care. Use the standard dosages of moxinoquantamine, and arrange for detainment as soon as possible. Use the standard cover story of the novas needing medical treatment. They are to be evaluated and moved to the nearest secure facility for treatment and observation. Sufficiently compromised novas are to be removed immediately, with a suitable story arranged to cover their disappearance.

Nova subjects are to be liquidated only in cases of extreme mutation or mental abnormalities or if extraction is not feasible. Any and all liquidations are to be authorized by me directly.

N the news

- Nigerois Nova Joins Operation Genesis

- Nigerois Nova Disappears During Violent Sandstorm

Nigerois Nova Joins Operation Genesis (8/27/09)

AGADEZ, NIGER (AP) — Project Utopia officials announced today in a press conference in Agadez that local nova, Mashala "Harmattan" Kader, would be joining the Operation Genesis terraforming effort in the Sahara.

Harmattan—whose nova name is a local term for the desert wind—erupted late last year at the age of 17, while traveling with his father's caravan during a sandstorm in the region. Harmattan's eruption created an "eye" in the center of the sandstorm, which grew to over three kilometers in diameter before dissipating. Shortly after reaching his home in Agadez, Harmattan traveled (under his own power) to Project Utopia headquarters in Addis Ababa, where he offered his services to the Project.

Now, after months of training at Project Utopia facilities, Harmattan has returned home to aid Utopia's latest operation. Standing before a crowd in his home city of Agadez, wearing the distinctive blue turban of the Tuareg tribesmen, Harmattan said, "It is a great honor to use the gifts I have been given to help Project Utopia aid my nation and my people. Allah willing, we will transform this land in a place of peace and prosperity for all."

Harmattan's nova abilities relate to the control of the wind and sand of his native desert, abilities that should be quite useful in Utopia's terraforming efforts in the Sahara.

"Harmattan is a valuable addition to the terraforming team," said Team Tomorrow leader Caestus Pax.

Project Utopia spokespersons continue to offer optimistic projections on the progress of Operation Genesis, as novas work around the clock to bring life from the barren sands of the Sahara. Noted Utopia terraformer Antaeus could not be reached for comment.



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Nigerois Nova Disappears During Violent Sandstorm (9/16/09)

AGADEZ, NIGER (AP) — Nigerois grieved for Mashala "Harmattan" Kader today in a nationwide day of mourning for the young nova. Harmattan disappeared five days ago during a violent sandstorm that struck the central Nigerois region where he and a number of other members of Project Utopia were working as part of Utopia's "Operation Genesis" effort to terraform the central Sahara.

The sandstorm, which struck without warning, blanketed the region some 80 kilometers outside Agadez, including Fachi and the Adrar Market. The quick response of Project Utopia novas helped prevent serious loss of life, although 14 deaths and numerous injuries still resulted from the storm, along with an estimated \$1.2 million in damage to property and terraforming equipment.

Among those missing after the sandstorm cleared was Harmattan, a Nigerois nova recently assigned to Operation Genesis. Search efforts by Utopian novas are ongoing, but even Project Utopia officials hold out little hope of finding Harmattan alive. "An unprotected baseline could survive in the Sahara for a day or two," said a Utopia spokesperson. "A nova of Harmattan's abilities might be able to survive a bit longer, but even novas need water."

"This is a great loss, to both Project Utopia and the world," said Caestus Pax, leader of Team Tomorrow. "Harmattan was a young man who wanted nothing more than to use his nova abilities to benefit humanity, and he will always be remembered."

Project Utopia claims there is no truth to speculation that Harmattan himself may have been the cause of the sandstorm or to rumors that Harmattan was a Teragen sympathizer, who caused the sandstorm in order to disrupt Operation Genesis and escape. Local Nigerois, angry at the suggestion that their countryman was involved in the incident, continue to gather and pray outside local mosques, offering gifts of food and handcrafts to honor the memory of the missing Harmattan.

TOP SECRET

ALPHA-LEVEL CLEARANCE ONLY

From: Director Laragione

To: All Project Utopia directors and Team Tomorrow leaders

Re: Antaeus

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a serious problem. Antaeus has disappeared.

He was scheduled to meet with a member of the Project staff at 10 A.M. yesterday morning in Sector 3 of the Ethiopia biosphere laboratory. When he failed to appear after nearly two hours, the staff reported his disappearance. A thorough search of the biospheres and the entire Addis Ababa headquarters — including sweeps using quantum-enhanced senses — failed to turn up any traces of Balmer's whereabouts. We believe he left the premises of the A-A facility sometime between the hours of 11:45 P.M. and 10 A.M., September 16-17.

Since there were no signs of any sort of struggle, we must assume Antaeus left of his own free will. While unlikely, we must entertain the possibility that Antaeus left in order to "jump ship" to another organization, either the so-called "Aberrants" or even the Teragen. We've contacted the DeVries Agency and Novelty Consulting, but there is no evidence Antaeus was in contact with either, plus I think they know enough not to cross us. It's also possible Antaeus went off on his own. He's made it clear that he's not happy about how Operation Genesis is being handled, and this may be his way of driving the point home.

There is no evidence of Antaeus leaving the Project grounds through any conventional means. No record on security monitors, and nothing at any port of exit. Given his abilities, however, it is likely Antaeus left under his own power. With his ability to move through the earth he could be anywhere in the world by this time. His geo-carapace has also proven extremely difficult to pick up on convention sensors in the past, so it's a simple matter for Antaeus to "lay low," concealed in nearly any plant-life or even within the ground for as long as he likes.

We have contacted Antaeus' sister, mother and known associates, but there has been no contact from him in the past 48 hours. We are following up any communication and correspondence that might have taken place in the past few months, but so far, it does not appear promising. Checks of OpNet records show no signs of outside communications, although the technical staff is currently checking for the possibility of tampering with the logs and backups.

It is imperative that we find Antaeus as soon as possible. I want all Utopia personnel not currently involved in important assignments to devote all their energies to this task. We need to find Antaeus quickly and, more importantly, we need to do it before anyone outside the organization realizes he's gone. I want a total media blackout on this one. If anyone asks, Antaeus is heavily involved in Operation Genesis and cannot be disturbed for any reason. Genesis work will continue as normal in order to provide support for our story. Cover the search operations using whatever means you deem appropriate.

Once Antaeus is located, assess his current situation and state of mind. That will determine our next course of action. Our goal is to return him to Addis Ababa as soon as possible, and to open up a dialog with him to find out what made him disappear like this. Do not, I repeat, *do not*, attempt to bring Antaeus in by force. That is only likely to make a bad situation worse and result in a lot of dead or injured people. Remember, Antaeus is one of the most powerful novas known. Handle him with care.

Best of luck,

J. Laragione, Director, Project Utopia

From an e-mail distributed by Raoul Orzaiz to selected members of the Teragen:

Well, my friends, it seems Utopia's perfect house of cards is starting to fall in more ways than one. Certain sources have revealed to me that Antaeus has finally shown some spirit and defied his Utopian masters by walking (or is that "burrowing"?) out on their operation. Utopia is keeping the matter quiet while they search for the missing Antaeus, but it's only a matter of time before the media sharks smell blood in the water and a feeding frenzy ensues. What an amusing spectacle that will be.

Interestingly enough, I've heard nothing from Antaeus himself, nor has anyone I've spoken with. Of course, the two of us agreed on nothing other than to share the same planet, and I'm not certain Antaeus would accede even to that. Still, there is a possibility

Antaeus has seen the light and might be willing to listen to our side of things. For that reason, I would very much like to speak to him. His abilities and reputation could be very useful to us.

As to where he has gone, I cannot say. It seems most likely he will go where he is comfortable and can hide from Utopia's searchers (if in fact hiding is his goal), but that still leaves millions of square kilometers of forest and jungle where Antaeus could hide for years and never be found. He has no need for baseline forms of transportation, nor for things like food and drink, so tracking him is out of the question.

If you do happen to catch any hint of Antaeus' whereabouts or his plans, be sure to inform me. And should you happen to actually speak with him, mention that I, and others, are interested in talking to him, face to face. Otherwise, it seems the next move is up to him.

Regards, Raoul

From a Telecom Virus Message

Distributed by Sophia Rousseau to members of the Aberrants

Friends, an opportunity of unprecedented proportions has come to our attention. It seems Dr. Spencer "Antaeus" Balmer has chosen to leave Project Utopia. Antaeus disappeared from Addis Ababa without a trace, and Project Utopia is currently searching for him.

The reasons for Antaeus' sudden disappearance remain unknown, but it doesn't appear he was taken against his will (as if anyone could do so without laying waste to most of the city). This suggests Antaeus left Utopia of his own free will. We've heard rumors that Utopia has been pushing its novas hard for progress on Operation Genesis. This may be the straw that broke the camel's back. Or it is possible Antaeus discovered something about the conspiracy inside Utopia and chose to flee in order to protect his own life.

In either case, we should do everything possible to locate Antaeus and establish contact with him. If he left Utopia from dissatisfaction with their policies, he may be willing to aid our cause. If he discovered something Utopia does not want the outside world to know, then it is vital we acquire the information and see to its distribution.

We've been waiting for the conspiracy to make a mistake and leave themselves vulnerable. This may be our chance. We should seize it.

Directive E-mail

From: Director Harris
To: All field directors
Re: Operation Green Man

Our sources have confirmed that the nova Spencer Balmer disappeared from Project Utopia and Utopia is conducting an extensive search for him. Utopia has not informed the press or any official organizations of Balmer's disappearance. Balmer's reasons for leaving Utopia, and his current state of mind, remain unknown.

All field agents are ordered to be on the lookout for Balmer (file photos attached) and any indication of his whereabouts. Any information should be reported directly to me as soon as possible. Under no circumstances are field agents to directly engage Balmer. He is a Titan-class nova and should be considered extremely dangerous. Repeat, *do not engage*.

Agents should also maintain surveillance on all Utopia operations for indications of Balmer's whereabouts. All reports are to be filed with this office.

Proteus Communiqué

Double-encrypted with Sigma Babylon 2; dated 9/16/08

To all field agents:

Dr. Spencer Balmer (AKA Antaeus) left the Project Utopia site in Addis Ababa some time within the past 12 hours for an unknown destination. The sudden disappearance of Balmer shows a serious flaw in our handling of the Team Tomorrow novas, which I believed was corrected after the Landers' situation. I want all handlers to begin close monitoring of their subjects for any signs of information about Antaeus' whereabouts. Any information (no matter how insignificant) is to be communicated immediately.

All other agents will join in the search for Balmer's whereabouts. Ideally, Balmer is to be returned to the Utopia fold, with the rest of the world none the wiser. If that is not possible, he will be remanded to a secure facility so we can determine the reasons for his sudden defection and have the opportunity to study such a powerful nova more closely. It is possible Balmer may be aware of our existence; agents should take the appropriate precautions.

Under *no* circumstances should Dr. Balmer be allowed to continue to roam free or, worse yet, contact other novas, particularly members of the Teragen or the Aberrants. Balmer's elimination is authorized only if absolutely necessary to prevent his defection to another organization or an exposure of the Project.

Director Thetis

Utopia's Operation Genesis Moves Forward

DJADO, NIGER (AP) — A handful of Nigerois merchants, along with several dozen camels, were the sole witnesses of the latest step in Project Utopia's dramatic terraforming operation in the Sahara, near the abandoned city of Djado. Originally built as a station along a slave-trading route between Niger and Libya, the block-like adobe buildings of Djado have been abandoned for years, surrounded by malarial swamps and reputed by local tribesmen to be haunted.

That legend appeared to come true yesterday evening. Around 11:00 P.M., the small ring of foliage around Djado began to grow rapidly, so rapidly the merchants and their camels were forced to flee rather than be overrun by the spreading trees, grasses and vines that sprang up from the ground around them.

"It was as though the plants were a pack of jackals, digging their way up through the sand," said Aboubacar Badou, who has plied the trade routes through central Niger for almost 30 years. "They grew up everywhere around us. I had to cut my brother loose from the vines that started growing up his legs, like he was a trellis." The vegetation continued growing for several hours at a vastly accelerate rate. By morning, a region some 10 kilometers in radius around Djado was covered in lush vegetation, and the ruins of the abandoned town were virtually obscured by tall trees and flowering, hanging vines.

A Project Utopia spokesperson confirmed that the dramatic display at Djado was merely the latest step in the organization's terraforming operations. "You have to excuse the sense of drama," said Ms. Dafileh Tugero at Utopia's Addis Ababa headquarters. "But the transformation of the Sahara into a fertile environment like Ethiopia is a dramatic process." Ms. Tugero issued an apology to the Nigerois near the Djado site, saying that the site was supposed to be cleared of all personnel before the operation began in earnest. Project Utopia promised to increase security at the site to ensure there would be no similar incidents. True to their word, Utopia has kept everyone back from the terraforming site. However, a number of novas, some of them not members of Project Utopia, have arrived and entered the site unopposed for reasons as yet unknown.

In the meanwhile, the Nigerois who witnessed the appearance of the vegetation around Djado have become minor local celebrities, relating what they saw to eager family, friends and neighbors. Two of the men report seeing a figure "made out of earth, leaves and grass," moving inside the densest part of the new foliage. Project Utopia did not confirm whether or not this figure was the organization's ecologist nova, Antaeus, who has been heavily involved in Operation Genesis.



Looks like we found Antaeus. Send someone to talk to him immediately.

Introduction

The Apostasy is the second chapter of **Aberrant: Worldwide**. It provides the characters with a look at the cracks appearing in Utopia because of the stress of the Slider scandal. It also provides an opportunity to meet representatives of the major factions of the **Aberrant** world in a neutral setting. The proceeding setting material is for the Storyteller to provide to the players as desired during the events in this chapter.

Overview

Operation Genesis is the name of Project Utopia's plan to terraform the Sahara Desert, using the same techniques as in Ethiopia. While Operation Genesis is motivated by altruism, it is also a public relations stunt on Utopia's part, to shore up its public-opinion polls in the wake of the scandals that rocked the organization following Jennifer Landers' murder. Utopia wants to focus the world's attention on the good things it is doing and away from accusations of corruption and conspiracy within the organization. This suits Project Proteus as well, since it diverts attention away from it.

Unfortunately, in their haste to implement Operation Genesis, Utopia makes two serious mistakes. Their first is pushing the timetable for the operation up, forcing novas working in the Sahara Desert to exert their powers more than ever before. This leads to Utopian novas racking up greater levels of Taint and possibly developing aberrations. It causes at least one young nova to go over the edge into madness and has lasting repercussions on other novas working for Utopia.

Utopia's second and more serious mistake is ignoring the objections of their star ecologist, Antaeus, to their accelerated terraforming program. When Antaeus refuses to assist in accelerating Operation Genesis, Utopia chooses to go ahead with the project anyway, isolating Antaeus and working around him as best they can. When Antaeus discovers the truth (and with his Mega-Intelligence, it doesn't take long), he realizes the possible damage Utopia's plans could do to both the environment and his fellow novas.

Antaeus chooses to sever his ties with Utopia and put the brakes on Operation Genesis himself. He goes to an abandoned town in the depths of the Sahara and uses his powers to transform it overnight into a fantastic oasis from which he can oversee the terraforming of the desert in a proper manner. Naturally, Antaeus' departure from Utopia has serious repercussions throughout the world. As other factions catch wind of Antaeus' dissatisfaction, they hope to recruit the powerful nova to their cause. Utopia (and Project Proteus) wants Antaeus back or at least want to ensure he doesn't threaten its operations any further.

A reasonable man with his faith in his former associates shaken, Antaeus agrees to meet with representatives of the major factions in his new garden oasis. He

treats his guests to an opportunity to meet and socialize on neutral ground, then talks with them individually to hear them out. Characters have the opportunity to represent one faction (or more!) and present their arguments to Antaeus.

The chapter likely concludes with Antaeus choosing to remain neutral in order to protect his own interests but with a sort of détente between him and Project Utopia. It is possible, although highly unlikely, Antaeus might choose to ally with another faction (again somewhat informally). The final outcome depends on the actions of the characters and the direction of the group's series.

Theme

The theme of The Apostasy is one of free will and decisions. Novas have the power to affect the whole world with their abilities, but most have chosen to give away their power (and the responsibility that comes with it) to organizations that make the tough decisions for them, like Project Utopia, the Directive or Proteus. Independent novas often find themselves at odds with these organizations, who want to limit the ability of "wild cards" to affect their plans.

Novas have the power to change the world, and whoever controls the novas controls the fate of the world. Members of the Teragen are aware of this and advocate for novas to hold on to their power to make decisions affecting themselves and others. Novas like the Aberrants have learned the hard way the price of giving away the power to make your own choices and trusting in an organization (no matter how benevolent) to make them for you.

In this story, Antaeus learns that lesson. For years, his goals and Utopia's intersected, allowing them to work together. Now, he finds himself at odds with Utopia over its handling of Operation Genesis and must decide what to do. At first, he merely refuses to go along with plans he considers wrong, but when Utopia ignores his objections, risking both the Sahara and his fellow novas, Antaeus chooses to take action.

The characters also have choices to make in this story. First, they are confronted with a Taint-ridden nova and must decide how best to deal with him. Later, they must decide how to sway Antaeus to their cause (whatever it may be). This gives the players a chance to think about what their characters *really* believe in and to hear the views of other factions of the **Aberrant** world. It also shows the players the importance of individual novas and the impact they can have on the rest of the world. How will they feel about their allegiance after this story is done?

Mood

The mood of this story is one of hope and opportunity. Even Project Utopia, suffering from its recent setbacks, has high hopes that Operation Genesis will bolster its public relations. Other factions see cracks

appearing in Utopia's perfect façade, opportunities they can exploit for their own benefit. This is a time for novas to take action and prepare for the coming storm.

You, as the Storyteller, can convey this mood by giving the players a sense of urgency. Things are happening quickly, and the characters have to be involved or get left behind. Encourage the players to reflect on their characters' views on current events, and make them understand that their role in this story is an important one. How they decide to handle things will affect the course of events to come.

Setting

Since it is about terraforming, setting is fairly important to the story. The following sections describe details of the setting useful to the Storyteller.

Niger

The Apostasy takes place in Niger, a nation in sub-Saharan Africa roughly twice the size of Texas. Like most of its neighbors, Niger is an extremely poor country, with a tiny amount of arable land and a propensity for military coups. The last coup took place less than 10 years ago, and Nigerois restored a democratic government to their nation in 2004. A President, Council of Ministers and a two-chamber National Assembly run the current government.

Niger's population of 12.5 million people is primarily made up of various African ethnic groups. It includes a minority (nine percent) of Tuaregs. Known as "blue men" for their distinctive indigo-dyed veils and turbans, the Tuaregs are people of Middle Eastern descent living in the Sahara desert. They fought a guerilla war against the Nigerois government years ago in order to secure greater representation for their people and their interests. The nation also has a small number of European expatriates (particularly French and Belgian). French is Niger's official language, although the African languages of Hausa and Djerma are also common.

Some 80 percent of the population are Muslims, including the Tuaregs. The remainder are a combination of Christian and African faiths, along with agnostics and atheists. Muslim values are fairly strong in the region. Generally speaking, they follow the Sunni trend of viewing novas as special people gifted by Allah. Storytellers may wish to consult the *Aberrant Storytellers Screen* for additional information on Islam in the *Aberrant* world.

Niger is a poor, landlocked country, with a single river (the Niger) flowing through its outskirts. Its economy is based on subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry, reexport trade and increasingly less on uranium, its major export since the 1970s. The Nigerois monetary unit is the West African franc. Terms of trade with Nigeria, Niger's largest regional trade partner, have fallen off somewhat in recent years since Nigeria was taken over by the dictator Alafin Sango, but Niger is engaging

in more and more trade with Ethiopia, with subsidies from the United Nations and Project Utopia. The government relies heavily on these programs and so is inclined to go along with whatever Project Utopia wants.

Niamey

Niger's capitol, Niamey is a scattered, low-rise settlement of not quite a million people along the muddy shores of the Niger River in the western corner of the country. One of the poorest national capitols in the world, Niamey has more of the feel of a backwater town than a city, despite its size and population. Most of the buildings are low and ramshackle, with a few larger structures like the government buildings and the old, decaying Grand Hôtel overlooking the muddy brown waters of the river. The newest buildings are often unfinished and already decaying in the harsh environment.

Patches of savanna remain even in the center of the city, and the streets are uncrowded, since there are only a few private cars, minivans and buses, along with military jeeps and vehicles. Most people walk, and the streets have more than their share of cart vendors, hucksters, beggars and prostitutes. The official marketplace is a splash of color and activity, with various goods (usually produce and spices) laid out on woven blankets under awnings that shade against the desert sun.

Generally speaking, Niamey (and Niger in general) sees few, if any, novas, so nova characters are quite likely to be mobbed by people who want to know more about them. People beg them for blessings and demonstrations of their powers. Most of the Nigerois believe novas are specially gifted by Allah and attach a religious significance to their abilities. Well-known novas (like novox singers or members of Team Tomorrow) attract huge crowds, forcing the police and local authorities to ask the novas to limit their appearances in public, in order to avoid causing riots. Stress the kind of hero-worship found here to the players, so they can see just how important their characters are.

Agadez

The town of Agadez once lay on the southern edge of the Sahara, prospering on the trade of slaves, gold and salt. But that was centuries ago, before the desert shifted further south. Now Agadez is a mud and adobe-walled town of some 80,000 people living on charity, international aid and a tiny amount of commerce, including the salt trade from deeper in the desert. The central areas of the town date back to the 16th century, including an adobe mosque, with a towering minaret rising some 90 feet above dusty streets, and the sultan's palace, turned into a hotel for travelers, with rooms likened to living the sultan's dungeon rather than his palace. Most of the people of Agadez live in tin and straw shacks or adobe-walled huts.

Agadez has seen considerable activity of late due to the efforts of Operation Genesis. Project Utopia has established temporary quarters on the outskirts of the

city for nearly 1,000 of its own personnel, including a number of novas. The town is also crowded with media personnel and their equipment. A small forest of satellite dishes and antennas is growing around the town, as the media beams images of Operation Genesis across the world. The mood in the town is one of hope and wonder, as everyone watches and waits for Operation Genesis to transform the desert into a fertile paradise. Still, there is an edge of resentment on the part of the locals, who are being pushed aside by the organization purporting to help them.

Djado

The so-called "ghost town" of Djado is located further north and west into the desert than Agadez, but aside from that, the two are similar in many ways. Centuries ago, Djado was a way station for caravans making their way through the Sahara, particular for the active slave trade in Africa. For generations it has been home only to snakes, scorpions and desert rats. The blocky adobe buildings of the town stand long vacant, like children's blocks scattered on the desert floor. The oasis that originally surrounded the town has become a salty malarial swamp of spiky palm trees and saw-edged ground plants. Djado has a reputation for being haunted among the people of Niger, so traders and travelers tend to avoid it, camping well enough way from the outskirts.

Shortly after Antaeus' arrival, Djado undergoes a startling transformation. See *The Garden* for details.

The Sahara

The Sahara is the largest desert region in the world, stretching across northern Africa in a wide band from east to west. It has an area of some nine million square kilometers and includes the nations of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Sudan.

The geography of the desert is varied. In the west, the Sahara is rocky with varied elevation. It does contain underground rivers, which sometime penetrate to the surface, resulting in oases. The central plateau region of the Sahara has more elevation than the other areas, with peaks such as Emi Koussi and Tahat. Even though the area lacks rainfall, these peaks are snowcapped during the winter. The Eastern part of the Sahara, the Libyan Desert, is extremely dry with very few oases. Although the Nile Valley and the Nubian Desert to the east are geographically part of the Sahara, the influence of the Nile transforms the desert into fertile agricultural land throughout much of Egypt.

The Sahara's climate is hot and dry. Although temperatures during the day can skyrocket as high as 54.4° C (130° F), it becomes very cold in the desert at night, with temperatures dropping down to almost freezing. The harsh desert conditions cause one health level of lethal damage per day to characters without proper water, shelter and rest and may still require Endurance checks

to avoid an additional level of bashing damage per day. This damage cannot be soaked and cannot be recovered until the character moves to a more hospitable environment. Novas with the Adaptation enhancement can generally ignore these problems, and novas can add their dots in Mega-Stamina to the number of days before damage occurs. So a nova with four dots in Mega-Stamina only takes a health level of damage for every five days spent in the desert.

The harsh conditions may be a consideration for novas operating in the desert covertly or for characters stranded in the desert for any reason.

Runnnng The Apostasy

There are a number of different ways Storytellers can approach the events in this story, depending on the nature of the character group and its goals. This section provides some suggestions for possible approaches for the different factions of the *Aberrant* world.

Using This Material

The Storyteller should carefully read all the material in this chapter — including the fictional excerpts at the beginning — before running this story. The plotline of *The Apostasy* is fairly free form and open ended. How the group and the Storyteller approach the events described here depends entirely on the motivations of the characters, their allegiances, and their own plans and goals. The Storyteller should make the fictional material at the beginning of this chapter available to the players at the appropriate points in the story, based on the group's resources and affiliations. For example, Utopia characters should only have access to the publicly available material and whatever they can acquire on their own, while Directive characters should have access to Directive memos and information and so forth.

The Storyteller should encourage the players to be pro-active in this story. In many roleplaying stories, the characters are expected to wait around for someone in higher authority to tell them where to go and what to do. Although the organizations of the *Aberrant* world provide the framework for getting the characters involved in this story, what they do once they're involved is largely up to them. This chapter describes events and their outcomes as if the characters were not involved. The Storyteller should modify them according to the characters' actions.

Introducing the Characters

The *Apostasy* is suited for novas from virtually any walk of life or affiliation, provided they have an interest in the activities of Utopia and the future of their kind

(and most novas should). How the characters get involved in the events of the story and their goals depend on the faction the novas are allied with and their own personal agendas.

The Aberrants

The Aberrants see Operation Genesis as a clear sign that Utopia is worried. Utopia is pushing the operation harder and faster than usual. That lack of concern leads to mistakes, and the Aberrants are hoping the rush to move Operation Genesis forward will lead to the conspiracy within Utopia slipping up, leaving some exposed thread they can grab hold of and yank to see what unravels.

The Aberrants keep a close eye on Utopia operations in the Sahara, watching for any signs of compromising activity. Their prime goal is to expose the conspiracy, but some Aberrants also want to help Utopia accomplish what they see as a worthwhile terraforming effort. They do what they can to help move things along behind the scenes, helping out their fellow novas and earning some respect from them as well as the local baselines. After all, what group of "international terrorists" helps out with a humanitarian project?

The other reason for Aberrants helping out with Operation Genesis is to take some of the pressure off the Utopian novas. The Aberrants are concerned about the effects of Utopian novas pushing their abilities too far too fast. They want to help prevent that, and they're also on the look out for novas suffering from increases in Taint in order to keep them from "disappearing" like so many other novas into Project Proteus' secret facilities. They hope tainted novas can recover, given some time and proper care. (In the case of temporary Taint, this is true. Unfortunately, there is currently nothing that can be done for victims of permanent Taint.)

Aberrant characters can become involved in the story for the above reasons; going to the Sahara to covertly assist terraforming efforts while keeping an eye out for Proteus activity and aiding tainted novas. Once Antaeus makes his break with Utopia and reveals his presence in Djado, the characters can decide to go and talk with him in hopes of winning Antaeus over to the Aberrant cause or at least convincing him to no longer aid Project Utopia.

The Directive

The Directive has reasons for suspecting Project Utopia's motives about everything, including Operation Genesis. The Directive knows the operation is intended partly as a PR stunt to improve Utopia's image. It also knows Utopia places considerable importance on the operation, which makes it of interest to the Directive.

The Directive dispatches agents to the Sahara to keep tabs on the terraforming operation as well as the potentially tense international situation. They are likely to take note of increasing signs of Taint among the Utopian novas and may even take action to capture a tainted

nova or snatch one from the hands of Project Proteus for study.

Things really become interesting to the Directive when they catch word of Antaeus' disappearance from Addis Ababa. Directive agents are quickly assigned the job of tracking down the missing nova and, later, meeting with Antaeus in Djado to learn more about his intentions. The agents originally assigned to the Sahara, most likely entrusted with a fairly "routine" mission, suddenly find themselves with a major responsibility.

The Directive would love to lure Antaeus away from Utopia to work for them, but its interests lie more in checking Utopia's influence. The Directive is willing to support Antaeus' actions and offer him assistance in order to weaken Utopia, so long as it doesn't compromise the interests of the Directive's member nations.

Project Utopia

Project Utopia is backed into a corner, and it knows it. Public opinion has been turning against them since Slider's death. Utopia needs to reverse that trend and quickly. Operation Genesis is intended to do that, and Utopia needs all available novas in its employ to make the plan work. Utopian novas can become involved in the operation right from the very start.

The Storyteller can start things off with Utopia-affiliated novas or members of Team Tomorrow dealing with "hot zones" in Saharan regions like Nigeria and the northern Sudan, taking on nova elites and ensuring "government compliance" with Utopia's edicts for beginning the project. Utopia may permit the characters some additional leeway in making sure Operation Genesis begins on schedule, but it also makes clear that Utopia has to look good in front of the media, no matter what.

Once the operation gets underway, novas are tapped to help in the terraforming work. There is work for novas possessing any conceivable ability, from earth-moving and breaking down rocks to digging canals and wells, performing readings of soil composition, seeding clouds, transporting materials, assisting scientific teams and so forth. Social novas will be tapped to work PR and spin control, granting interviews and fielding reporters questions from dawn to dusk. Work on the operation is exhausting and should tax even the superhuman stamina of most novas with back-to-back duty shifts and challenging tasks that test the limits of their powers. Let the players realize the potential for accumulating Taint under these conditions and figure out the implications for themselves before their characters have to deal with Harmattan.

While working on the operation, Utopian novas can also deal with undercover Aberrants (or they may be undercover Aberrants), elites looking to cause trouble and similar problems. When Antaeus disappears, Utopia enlists them in the search to find him.

Once Antaeus makes his presence known in Djado, the characters can make up the Utopian delegation sent

to talk to him and convince him to return to the fold. They get a chance to meet face-to-face with some of the other factions and hear their points of view, which might affect what the characters think of Utopia when all is said and done.

Project Proteus

At first, the goal of Project Proteus is to ensure that Operation Genesis goes smoothly and helps divert attention from the Slider scandal back to Utopia's good works. Proteus agents are assigned to help "pave the way" for the operation, including doing whatever is necessary behind the scenes to ensure the compliance of the local governments, which might even include a carefully timed coup or assassination.

Once the operation is underway, Proteus agents keep a close eye on the novas working on Genesis. When it becomes clear that a nova is developing dangerously high levels of Taint, the agents are charged with arranging for that nova's "disappearance" to a Proteus facility where he can be treated (read: incarcerated, studied, probed and possibly euthanized for dissection). They also have to cover up any signs of Taint manifesting among the novas and keep the information from both the media and other groups like the Aberrants and the Teragen.

Proteus agents are ordered to watch out for signs of Aberrant, Directive and Teragen activity in and around Operation Genesis and ensure security. They can root out moles and even lay traps for potential troublemakers, leaking word that a particular nova is going to be "taken for treatment" in order to see if any Aberrants or Terats show up to rescue their endangered brother or sister (who is, of course, a Proteus agent). When Harmattan goes over the edge, Proteus' goal is to capture and neutralize him as quickly as possible. When Antaeus disappears, Proteus agents are assigned to help Utopia find him.

If the character group is actually responsible for the death of Slider in your series, Proteus might assign them to Operation Genesis as a means of having them "lie low" for a while. Either the novas are "hiding in plain sight" as members of the Project Utopia team, or they are operating covertly in the desert, ruthlessly handling any problems that threaten Proteus' plans.

The Teragen

Teragen novas are opposed to Operation Genesis for the most part. Some oppose it simply because they're opposed to everything Project Utopia supports. Others oppose Genesis for more philosophical reasons, usually because of Utopia's exploitation of novas and the potential risks of terraforming such a large area so quickly. The Terats believe novas shouldn't be at the beck and call of a baseline organization like Utopia.

At first, Teragen novas might try to cause trouble with the operation's progress. More rambunctious Terats may collapse new canals and excavations, destroy equipment, harass personnel and generally make life difficult

for the terraformers. Unfortunately, this plays directly into Utopia's hands, making Utopia look like the good guys being harassed by Terat "terrorists." Less hotheaded Terats may simply keep tabs on Utopia's progress.

The Teragen is certain to be interested when its brother and sister novas working on Operation Genesis begin to show signs of increased Taint. Terats may take matters into their own hands to ensure these novas are warned of the dangers of what they're doing, so they can at least make an informed choice. It's one thing to oppose a nova who's willingly chosen to live as a baseline lapdog and another to abandon a fellow nova to dangers he or she is not even aware of. They're also likely to try and keep any more novas from falling into the "tender care" of Project Proteus.

Once Antaeus breaks with Project Utopia, many Terats believe he's come around to their way of thinking. The Teragen wants to find out if Antaeus is willing to support it, even philosophically. Such support could help to sway other novas over to the cause. At the very least, Terats want to know where Antaeus stands, and whether or not he plans to oppose them in the future.

Independents

There's plenty of room for independent novas to get drawn into the events in *The Apostasy*. Characters may be elites working for a neighboring government, freelancers hired by Utopia to round out their terraforming or security personnel, public relations specialists working with Utopia, musicians on a tour of the region or even rulers of their own country!

Utopia Freelancers

Characters working for a freelance nova agency like DeVries or Novelty Consulting (or operating their own "hire a nova" business) can get called in as consultants by Project Utopia, which is already short-handed where Operation Genesis is concerned. This is very similar to the goals outlined for Project Utopia, above, except the characters likely have the well-being of their own company above that of Utopia, which can lead to some interesting conflicts of interest.

Characters can see firsthand the work involved in the terraforming operation and experience the adulation of grateful baselines. They may get tired of explaining over and over again how they are *not* really members of Team Tomorrow or even really members of Utopia. Perhaps their work on Genesis will make them wish they were, however (or make them grateful they don't have to put up with this sort of thing all the time!).

Once word of Antaeus' defection starts getting out, all bets are off. Agencies like DeVries and Novelty are willing to pay almost any price to have Antaeus on their payroll. (The very idea of hiring Antaeus back to Utopia for an exorbitant fee actually makes Amanda Wu giggle with glee.) Characters get sent to Djado to negotiate with Antaeus and offer him pretty much anything he wants to come and work for their agency. Characters running their

own nova "talent agency" should certainly be aware of the advantages of having the world's foremost ecological scientist and terraformer on the payroll.

Bread and Circuses

A major part of Operation Genesis is public relations, trying to improve Utopia's image in the media. It's important that Operation Genesis look good to the billions of people watching around the world. This is where Mega-Charisma and Mega-Appearance novas can really shine, putting on a show to keep the world's attention focused on the spectacle and wonder of the operation rather than the day-to-day drudgery and details involved in something as complex as terraforming.

For example, Project Utopia might arrange for the demolition of a particular rock outcropping to take place as part of an "exhibition" put on by Utopian novas or even the Xtreme Warfare Federation (XWF). The "work" of smashing the rock-face is combined with something baseline viewers can watch and cheer, interspersed with commercials and "documentary clips" singing the praises of Project Utopia and its allied organizations. Another possibility is combining terraforming work with an outdoor concert by a popular novox performer (with all the proceeds going to the terraforming effort, of course). Socially adept novas may also be assigned as "handlers" to deal with the media and ensure that only the right messages about the operation are going out over the airwaves and the OpNet.

Public relations characters are faced with the challenges of presenting the right face of Operation Genesis to the world while, at the same time, covering up things like increasing Taint among the Utopian novas and trouble involving the Aberrants, Teragen or the Directive. Ideally they can paint those groups as villains attacking Utopia's good works. The characters may change some of their opinions based on what they see during the story, or they may not care, so long as it brings in the ratings.

Novas with social Mega-Attributes make great candidates to speak with Antaeus on the behalf of Utopia once he strikes out on his own. Utopia may ask (or order) the characters to act as their emissaries to Antaeus' stronghold in Djado.

Elites

Nova elites are quite active in Africa, thanks to the almost never-ending series of border wars between nations there. The most likely way for elites to become involved in the events in Niger is for a neighboring country to hire them to spy on Utopia's terraforming project, out of concern that Operation Genesis is actually a cover for some sort of secret military build-up or aid to Niger. Libya fought several border wars with Niger over the past 20 years, making it a good candidate. Niger's southern neighbor Nigeria is run by a military dictatorship, and Nigerian "President" Alafin Sango thumbed his nose at Utopia before. He is now concerned that payback is in the offing.



While spying on Utopia operations (and avoiding Utopia and Proteus watchdogs), elites can run into trouble involving the tainted nova Harmattan and hear about Antaeus' sudden appearance in Djado. Their employer can send the elites to Antaeus with an offer of employment, sanctuary, a non-aggression pact or whatever other inducements the Storyteller (and the players) can dream up.

Vive la Nova!

An interesting role to put the characters into is as members of a junta controlling a neighboring African nation, giving them a strong interest in Utopia's plans for the region and the events in Niger.

The reason for the characters being in charge of the country, and the country itself, is left for the group to decide. The characters might be trying to restore justice and democracy to an area formerly saddled with a repressive dictatorship, or they might be dictators themselves, setting up their own banana republic. They could be using the nation as a power base for a personal cult or an experiment in social engineering. Perhaps the nation the characters control is Niger itself, having overthrown either a military dictatorship or the legitimate government. Now, Utopia wants to play in their backyard; do the characters accept, or are they willing to oppose Utopia?

The Storyteller may wish to play out a prelude story where the characters plan and execute their coup and assume control, only to have Project Utopia announce Operation Genesis shortly thereafter. That is sure to make the players paranoid regarding Utopia's intentions!

Other Hooks

Some other ways Storytellers can fit independent novas into this story include:

- The novas met and got to know Harmattan while training together at a Project Utopia facility (Addis Ababa, most likely). When Harmattan starts acting strangely, they try to find out what's happening with their friend.

- The novas all know Antaeus through various connections (possibly even as "a friend of a friend"), and Antaeus asks them to look into matters involving Operation Genesis for him, quietly. When Antaeus suddenly disappears and Project Utopia starts looking for clues, the characters should get very worried.

- The novas may be associated with an environmental group opposed to Operation Genesis because of the potential unforeseen repercussions on the global environment. After all, deserts exist for a reason, and it may not be a good idea to "fix" them. They can try and disrupt terraforming operations, spy on Utopia and end up entangled in matters when they discover Antaeus actually agrees with them!

- A precognitive or another nova with some sort of enhanced awareness notices particular "vibes" from Niger that suggest something big is going on there. It may be the rapid terraforming, the increased level of

Taint among the novas, Antaeus' plans or all of the above. When the novas investigate, they find themselves entangled in the events.

Behind the Scenes

Timeline

The events in *The Apostasy* are intended to cover September of 2009. The Storyteller can change the order and timing of events to suit the series as desired. The following is a summary of the major events and who is involved in them.

- **The Announcement:** Project Utopia announces Operation Genesis, improving its public relations somewhat. It begins to push the operation forward as quickly as possible.

- **Opening Moves:** The world reacts to Utopia's announcement and the beginning of Operation Genesis. The media descends on the Nigerois operation site and begins broadcasting information about the operation 24 hours a day. Utopian novas get to work, while other factions begin planning their own responses. The first hints of Taint start to appear among the Utopian novas, while the other factions begin to take action.

- **Sandstorm:** Harmattan, a Utopian nova, snaps because of accumulated Taint and goes on a rampage in the desert. The characters are the ones on hand to witness Harmattan's breakdown, and they have a chance to do something about it (if they so choose).

- **The Garden:** Word of Antaeus' defection from Project Utopia reaches the characters, and they are enlisted in the search to find him. After Antaeus dramatically announces his presence in Djado, the characters are sent there to speak with him, in hopes of swaying him to support their cause in one form or another. The characters meet up with a number of novas from other factions on the neutral ground created by Antaeus. They have a chance to interact with everyone and to present their case to Antaeus.

- **Wrap-Up:** The characters bid farewell to Antaeus, deal with the repercussions of their actions and make plans for the future.

The Announcement

The story begins when Project Utopia announces Operation Genesis to the world in a massive press conference in Addis Ababa. Of course, the characters may be privy to information about the operation prior to the public announcement, either through connections with Utopia or through spies, moles or sympathizers within the operation. The Storyteller should choose an appropriate time and place for the characters to first hear about the operation, giving them a chance to decide what (if anything) they want to do about it. The information can come during another story, such as *Strange Bedfellows* (see Chapter One).

Utopian characters may be present at the press conference announcing Genesis to the public, particularly if they are closely involved with the operation. They may also be on hand as security, watching out for Aberrant and Teragen party-crashers along with baseline troublemakers. Whether or not any show is up to the Storyteller, although a few false alarms can keep the players on their toes and heighten the tension of the story a bit.

Characters associated with the media may be on hand to cover the story or provide "expert commentary" (regardless of their actual expertise). Characters working for a local African government might be on hand as bodyguards for a government dignitary or even as representatives of the government (particularly if the characters run their own country).

Justin Laragione, Director of Project Utopia, makes the announcement about Operation Genesis himself. After briefly describing the project to the gathered members of the media, Laragione turns the podium over to Antaeus, who says a few words. He then uses his powers to transmit himself to Agadez in Niger, where he causes a fig tree to grow from the otherwise barren soil, which matures in a matter of seconds, as described in the article on page 45. The image is sent back live to Addis Ababa by Project Utopia, and it's spread across the OpNet in a matter of hours.

Characters present at the press conference may notice some trepidation on Antaeus' part, an indication that the Utopia nova is concerned about something. In fact, Antaeus' is mildly concerned. His Mega-Intelligence is already picking up hints that the PR aspect of Operation Genesis is more important to Utopia than anything else. It requires a (Wits + Rapport) roll at +3 difficulty to pick up on Antaeus' feelings through his normally inscrutable façade. Nova abilities like Mega-Perception or Mega-Wits (especially the Natural Empath enhancement) can enhance the chances of noticing something, and novas with Pretercognition may get a sense of unease at the announcement. Whatever the case, Antaeus transmits himself to Niger during the announcement and remains unavailable to talk to the characters afterward.

Characters who aren't around for the press conference hear all about it in the hours and days that follow, as Operation Genesis remains a major item in the news.

Opening Moves

Getting the characters involved in the story depends greatly on the group's background, affiliation and motivation. The Introducing the Characters section on page 59 provides guidelines for involving a wide variety of different characters in *The Apostasy*. This section looks at the characters' initial involvement in the story and the first challenges the Storyteller can offer the players.

Project Utopia and Proteus

Project Utopia novas have no problem whatsoever getting right into the story. Utopia assigns the charac-

ters to work on Operation Genesis in whatever capacity best suits their abilities. Some suggestions include:

- Novas with power over earth, water, plants, weather and similar forces work directly on terraforming efforts: moving sand dunes, leveling rocky outcroppings, digging canals, channeling sources of underground water, seeding ground cover and so forth.

- Mega-Strong novas (especially those with the Lifter enhancement) operate as living earthmovers in places where conventional construction equipment would bog down or even sink into the soft desert sand. Mega-Stamina novas can also operate in the burning desert for hours without "breaking down" like equipment would.

- Mega-Intelligent novas study ecological and geological data, plan areas for development and look for ways to accelerate the development process as much as possible. They (and other characters) may wonder why Antaeus isn't handling these aspects of the operation himself. The only answer they get from the Powers That Be at Utopia is that Antaeus is involved "in other areas of the project."

- Mega-Perceptive novas scout out development sites, look for weak points in rock structures, find underground water and so forth.

- Flying novas seed clouds to produce needed rainfall, airlift equipment into operational areas and (with Mega-Strength or another appropriate power) even help haul loads of nitrogen-rich earth mined from the sea bottom out into the desert. Novas with powers like Hypermovement, Teleport and Warp perform similar duties.

- Powers like Disintegration, Entropy Control and Temporal Manipulation speed up natural processes of erosion and break down rock and soil elements. Molecular Manipulation transforms existing elements into fertile, useful materials.

- Novas with other abilities work wherever they can and also provide security against possible Aberrant or Teragen trouble.

A key point for Utopian novas is the difficulty of the tasks facing them. They are expected to pull off stunts at the upper limit of their abilities, and any reports to Utopia saying things are too difficult are met only with a suggestion to "do your best" and a reminder that time is off the essence. As time goes on, Utopia becomes more and more insistent on forging ahead, ignoring or brushing aside complaints from the characters.

The Project is very generous with doses of adrenocilin to help its novas overcome fatigue and use their powers more efficiently. Nearly all the Utopian novas involved with Operation Genesis have to make regular Willpower rolls to avoid becoming addicted, and many fail. Keep in mind that the characters may not know of the addictive nature of adrenocilin, only that it makes them feel better and helps them to keep working.

Also keep in mind that the characters may not be fully aware of the nature of Taint and the risks involved. They know fairly well what their limits are and that pushing too

far beyond them makes them feel unwell, but Utopia and Proteus have kept the true dangers of Taint secret even from the nova community. Although the players may be aware of the risk of acquiring Taint, their characters cannot complain about the risk to Utopia, since they aren't supposed to be aware of it.

Characters may still notice strange things happening to themselves and their fellow novas and may suggest slowing the pace of the operation. Utopia representatives deny any such requests and continually reiterate to the characters the importance of Operation Genesis both to the world and to Project Utopia's continued success. "Problem" novas have a tendency to disappear, going off for "treatment."

Project Proteus characters operate basically the same as Utopian novas in the beginning. They may be assigned to assist with Operation Genesis, as above, or they might be working covertly, looking for signs of Aberrant and Teragen novas in the area and keeping watch for signs of Taint in Utopia's nova personnel.

Dealing with tainted novas is a key task for Proteus characters. Proteus knows that pushing the novas too hard may result in some dangerous levels of Taint, but they're willing to take the risk to move Operation Genesis forward, plus it provides them with a further opportunity to study the nature of Taint. Proteus characters are charged with keeping tabs on the other novas, watching for any signs of aberrations and gathering information on the accumulation of Taint.

Any novas with aberrations need to be contained and kept away from the public eye. The characters are provided with dosages of mox, which they can slip into a nova's food or water to help neutralize their abilities before seeing that they're taken to a Rashoud facility for treatment. In mild cases, the treatment may simply be a complete physical and some therapy to return the nova to duty as quickly as possible. With more extreme aberrations, Proteus arranges for a cover story and sends the nova to a facility like the one in Bahrain (see Chapter Three). The characters are in charge of making sure the nova gets sent to the facility, willing or not, and that the cover story is airtight. Proteus cannot risk any further leaks of sensitive information at this point.

The Aberrants and the Teragen

Aberrant and Terat characters have similar goals at the beginning of the story: See what Utopia is really up to in the Sahara, and safeguard the lives of fellow novas endangered by the operation's low safety margins. Aberrants are interested in exposing the conspiracy inside Utopia and finding clues to the identity of Slider's killer. The Teragen is interested in causing trouble for Utopia and freeing fellow novas from what they see as virtual slavery to the baselines.

Hidden Aberrants still working for Utopia can get involved as described above, while passing information

on to their fellow Aberrants and doing what they can to help other novas suffering from increased levels of Taint. Hidden Aberrants walk a dangerous tightrope, particularly with the possibility of Proteus agents nearby, keeping close watch on Operation Genesis. Exposure might send Hidden Aberrants running from Utopia and can be an interesting way to start things off for Hidden Aberrant characters in this story, getting them more and more involved in the Aberrant movement for the later chapters of this book.

Aberrants operating outside of Project Utopia can arrive in Niger looking to find out more about Operation Genesis and Utopia's plans. They might consider the operation a worthy goal and could try helping out behind the scenes. It's a risky proposition that offers fairly little reward, since Utopia is likely to take the credit unless the characters come up with something clever. Still, some characters might see it as a way to remain true to Utopia's ideals while fighting against Utopia's policies. It also serves as a way to take some of the workload off the Utopian novas, reducing their accumulation of Taint.

Other Aberrants might prefer to sabotage Operation Genesis and make things more difficult for Utopia. This is also a likely course of action for Teragen novas, particularly the troublemakers. This can include undoing much of Utopia's work in the dead of night, sabotaging equipment, stirring up trouble with the locals (novas with Mega-Charisma and Mega-Manipulation can shine here) or even full-out quantum assaults on Utopia terraforming teams for the sake of the television cameras. Generally speaking, open confrontation with Utopia is foolish and pointless. Unless the novas have a quick, untraceable means of escape such as Teleport or Warp, Team Tomorrow will show up to pound them into the ground. Would-be saboteurs need to be subtle if they are to avoid capture.

Aberrants and Terats might also try recruiting from amongst the novas assigned to the operation. Carefully planned, there are opportunities to meet and talk with Utopian novas with only a small chance of being overheard (provided the Utopians can be convinced to cooperate and ditch any Proteus shadows they might have watching them). Terats can make a case against Operation Genesis and/or Utopia, and Aberrants can try and tell others about the mounting evidence of a conspiracy within Utopia.

These efforts become even more important once some of the Utopian novas begin to show signs of increased levels of Taint. It should become clear to anyone closely watching the novas working on Operation Genesis that they are exerting their powers to their limits, and some of them are beginning to show signs of strain. Even before Harmattan loses it, the characters should be aware there is a danger to their fellow novas.

The Teragen, at least, is motivated to do what it can to warn and aid these novas, and the Aberrants are likely to want to do the same. They may be able to con-

vince the Utopian novas of the risks they are taking, but keep in mind that the novas working for Project Utopia have been subjected to a considerable amount of internal propaganda concerning the Aberrants and the Teragen. Utopian novas think the Teragen and the Aberrants misguided at best, terrorists and criminals at worst. The Utopian novas are also taking regular doses of adrenocilin, which tends to make them somewhat passive and less likely to notice anything wrong or question Utopia's authority.

The Directive

Characters working for the Directive are assigned to go to Niger and keep tabs on Operation Genesis, if possible gathering intelligence on Utopia's terraforming methods and the novas working for them. Utopia projects like Genesis are a blatant example of the kind of social and political power the organization wields, the power the Directive exists to curb and control.

Directive agents can enter Niger by whatever means they have at their disposal. They can enter Lagos in Nigeria and make their way across the border incognito, they can arrive in Niger as part of a media crew, or they can use their own abilities to make their way into the area. They may have to deal with things like suspicious border patrols, corrupt bureaucrats, roving bands of bandits and so forth.

The Directive is even willing to risk sending in nova agents lacking Dormancy because of the extreme amount of nova activity going on in and around the project site in Niger. The quantum energies of the Project Utopia novas are sufficient to mask the covert activities of a few other novas in the area, provided they are reasonably discrete.

Directive agents have to deal with maintaining their cover identities and hiding from Project Utopia security forces on the lookout for any signs of trouble. Directive agents can spy on Utopia's operations and gather information, avoiding detection along the way. They might choose to cooperate with Aberrants or Terats in the area to learn what they know about Genesis, but agents should be careful about revealing their true allegiance in the process, since neither faction trusts the Directive any more than they do Utopia.

Directive agents may also run up against their opposite numbers from Project Proteus, looking to keep Genesis free from any outside influences. This can lead to a dangerous game of cat-and-mouse in the desert and amongst the buildings and baselines of Agadez or Niamey.

In their observations of Operation Genesis, Directive agents may pick up on signs of Taint and aberrations amongst the Utopian novas. How they choose to handle this is up to them. They might try and gather more information from a discrete distance that they can take back with them. Or they might try making direct contact with an affected nova, either to learn more or to get the nova to defect from Project Utopia and come to the Directive

for study and treatment. Most Utopian novas are highly unlikely to do so of their own free will, particularly the novas assigned to Genesis. They have already been warned against "subversive elements," and most are taking enough adrenocilin to keep them from questioning Utopia's orders.

Independents

How independent novas get involved in the opening moves of the story is largely up to the nature of the group.

Freelancers: Nova consultants from the DeVries Agency, Novelty Consulting and similar companies working for Utopia can use the information provided for Project Utopia, above. Since they are not part of Utopia, consultant characters might refuse Utopia's supply of adrenocilin. Operating outside Utopia's structure, they may be the first to notice problems other novas are having and pick up on signs of trouble. Of course, Utopia officials brush off their concerns, but the characters do have the advantage of forewarning when things really start happening.

Elites: Elites may be working (knowingly or not) for Proteus, helping keep an eye on the situation in Niger, dealing with any problem novas and maintaining security. Proteus might also hire elites to cause trouble along the Nigerois border, giving Team Tomorrow something to do in front of the eyes of the media. They might also be assigned to put pressure on some of the local governments, deal with minor uprisings, root out terrorist encampments and similar para-military tasks.

It is equally possible that elites may be working for one of the local governments, which wants to "encourage" Utopia to move terraforming operations to their territory rather than Niger. These elites may do so using terrorist tactics to sabotage and slow the progress of Operation Genesis so their employer can offer Utopia a "safe haven" from which to operate.

Public Relations: Operation Genesis is important to Project Utopia's public image, so novas involved in promoting Utopia's PR have their work cut out for them. They have to handle the media and keep its attention focused on all the good Utopia is doing in the Sahara (and the rest of the world), while at the same time steering them away from embarrassing questions about Slider's murder, André Corbin's whereabouts and the activities of the Aberrants. They also have to handle any incidents that crop up during the operation, either with Utopia novas developing Taint or the actions of Aberrants, Terats, Directive agents and so forth. Their job is to show Utopia in the best possible light.

These novas' position as spokespeople and representatives of Utopia also makes PR characters popular targets for other factions. Aberrants might risk talking to PR characters in order to try and convince them that there is more going on with Utopia and Operation Genesis than they realize. The Teragen might choose to disrupt a carefully planned press conference or demonstration

"to tear away Utopia's decaying façade of perfection to show the world its true face."

Sandstorm

The characters have been involved with Operation Genesis (in one way or another) for a while. They've handled some minor problems and started to get at least an inkling that something is wrong with the operation and that some of Utopia's novas are being pushed too far, too fast. That's when the sand hits the fan. One of the Project Utopia novas, a Nigerois named Harmattan, goes over the edge from excessive Taint and snaps.

First Signs

Harmattan is a young and relatively inexperienced, but powerful, nova. Project Utopia assigned him to Operation Genesis because his abilities were perfectly suited to operating in the desert and because he is originally from Niger, making him a local hero and a virtual poster child for everything Utopia and Genesis are trying to accomplish there. Harmattan is quite proud to be helping his homeland, and his shy and modest nature plays very well to the cameras, even if his English is less than perfect. He's almost fanatically devoted to Utopia and considers his nova abilities a gift from Allah. He believes all novas have a duty to use their powers to help humanity.

Harmattan has been pushing himself harder and harder to accomplish everything Utopia and his people expect from him and more. He works incredibly long

hours, often going for days without rest. His Mega-Stamina allows him to ignore even the desert's burning heat and work almost tirelessly. More and more often, Harmattan takes to working alone in the desert for hours at a time, using his powers to shift massive sand dunes and to slowly alter the air currents of the area according to Utopia's design. His constant exertion of his powers and his need to quickly recover the quantum energy required to keep going cause Harmattan to rack up serious amounts of Taint.

As his Taint increases, Harmattan's behavior begins to change. He becomes more and more distant, preferring to work by himself and to avoid social activities. He asks to be taken off public relations duty for a while and stays away from the bright lights of the media. He becomes more furtive and jumpy, always looking behind him, always checking to see if he's being watched.

One night, while the characters are nearby, Harmattan blows up at someone (maybe even one of them) for standing too close to him. "Do you *have* to stand so close?" he asks. He quickly apologizes to the person and says that fatigue must be getting to him. He's been working for nearly four days straight, a long stretch even for a nova. He tries to brush the whole matter off as fatigue. A character who makes a Wits + Rapport roll notices Harmattan seems very on edge, even after he laughs off the incident. An Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty +1) points out that Harmattan has been taking regular doses of adrenocilin lately.



The Storm Strikes

The following day, Harmattan is working alone out in the desert some 80 kilometers from Agadez. The characters should be nearby. Either they're working in the area, or they're going to check on Harmattan's progress. If they are operating covertly, then the incident of the previous night might send them to check up on Harmattan, possibly to feel him out for recruitment into the Aberrants or the Teragen.

As the characters approach Harmattan's location, just over a nearby dune, they hear a terrible wail of pain, followed by a roaring wind that whips across the desert sands. Out of nowhere springs a raging and violent sandstorm, coming right at the characters!

The sandstorm is an uncontrolled manifestation of Harmattan's Elemental Mastery power. It extends in a 150-meter radius around Harmattan and grows 10 meters in radius every turn. This is far larger than Harmattan's usual range, fueled by his expanding M-R node. In an hour, the sandstorm will be nearly 25 kilometers wide and still growing, although Harmattan will likely be disabled before then. The storm inflicts eight levels of bashing damage per turn to anyone inside it, reduces all characters' dice pools by two due to the blinding sand and driving wind and halves movement and vision within the area. Harmattan himself is unaffected by the storm (save for the vision penalty, which applies even to him).

The characters are caught in the outer edge of the storm when it appears. They must each make Strength + Athletics rolls (difficulty +2) to avoid being knocked down by the sheer force of the wind and sand. Mega-Strength novas automatically succeed. The characters have to shout in order to be heard above the screaming wind, and Harmattan does not answer if they call out to him. A Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty +4) can barely make out a huddled figure in the midst of the storm. If a character uses a power like Telepathy to contact Harmattan, see the following section.

Talking to Harmattan

Characters who make their way to the center of the sandstorm find Harmattan huddled over mumbling to himself in French (barely audible unless a character has Mega-Perception or is standing right next to him). The moment anyone—friend, stranger or otherwise—makes contact with Harmattan, either speaking to him or touching him (or something more violent like shaking him or using a power against him) the young nova attacks the characters in a paranoid rage, shouting and ranting at them.

"Get back!" he screams. "Stay away from me! You're not going to kill me! Not like you killed her. I know you did it. Why won't you leave me alone?" He continues to rant and rave about how he knows the characters are assassins sent to kill him, that they killed Slider and that they are agents of Shaitan (the Devil). Ironically, it's entirely possible depending on the characters' affiliation that he's right (at least about the first two, maybe even the last).

Harmattan has gone entirely over the edge into extreme paranoia. Attempts to reason with him are largely futile; there's nothing the characters can do to convince him that they're not out to get him, and anything they say to the contrary is taken as an attempt to deceive him. A Mega-Manipulative or Mega-Charismatic nova *might* be able to talk Harmattan down with a successful Manipulation + Subterfuge roll (difficulty +8!) but only by playing along with his delusions ("It's all right, we know all about Them. They're after us too. We can take you someplace safe where They'll never find you."). Don't forget about the dice pool penalties for Harmattan's sandstorm during these attempts.

Unless the characters manage to calm Harmattan down or choose to flee the scene, they're left with no choice except to fight him.

Fighting Harmattan

Harmattan is a tough opponent, fighting on his home turf, but he's still no match for a group of novas. The characters should be able to take him down with some effort, although it shouldn't be easy.

The first factor is Harmattan's use of adrenocilin. The current amount in his system reduces his wound penalties by one and adds one die to all his quantum power skill totals. The adrenocilin also allows him to shake off a single dose of moxinoquantamine (mox), although it does neutralize the adrenocilin in the process.

The second factor is the penalty to dice pools imposed by Harmattan's sandstorm. His enraged, highly energized state allows him to maintain the storm without taking the usual +2 concentration penalty, and the storm does not affect him, so the characters have to contend with being battered unconscious by driving sand while trying to control the raging Harmattan at the same time.

Lastly, Harmattan's Mega-Wits allow him to make multiple actions more easily. If he makes a Wits roll (+1 difficulty) his multiple action penalties for the turn are halved.

Harmattan strikes first with his crush ability, causing dunes to rise up like waves to smash into opponents. He begins using his lethal blast, firing high velocity streams of sand like a sandblaster, if he takes any lethal damage in the fight. If he's badly hurt (Maimed or worse) he tries to escape, using the sandstorm as cover.

Aftermath

Assuming the characters defeat Harmattan (which is the most likely outcome), they have to decide what to do with him (or his body, if he's dead). Time is of the essence. Remind the characters that a massive sandstorm and quantum battle is likely to draw attention. There are Utopia and Proteus novas already on their way, followed closely by the media.

If the characters are Utopian novas, standard procedure requires them to take Harmattan into custody and deliver him to Utopia for medical and psychiatric treatment. Of course, if the characters have been talking with

Aberrants or other outsiders about what happens to novas delivered into the "care" of a Rashoud facility, then they might have doubts.

If the characters are Proteus agents, they should do everything in their power to contain the situation and deliver Harmattan to a Rashoud facility as soon as possible. If Harmattan is dead, the characters have to find some way to cover it up, so as not to tarnish Project Utopia's reputation.

If the characters are Aberrants or Teragen members, they will likely want to take Harmattan with them to see if they can help him. That requires smuggling a deranged nova out of the country to some safe haven where he can be treated. Characters who saw the extent of Harmattan's madness might be more inclined toward a mercy killing, although that is far from easy, given Harmattan's Mega-Stamina. Terats should be reminded of the Teragen's abhorrence of novas killing novas.

Let the players decide what they want to do, and give whatever plan they come up with a fair chance of success. You can play out the details of dealing with Harmattan and cleaning up the aftermath of the fight or simply assume the characters deal with the matter "off camera" and move on to the next scene of the story.

How Do the Other Factions React?

What happens after Harmattan's breakdown depends entirely on the actions of the characters. Team Tomorrow and Project Utopia novas show up shortly after the incident, including agents of Project Proteus. Their job is to take Harmattan into custody (if he's alive) or recover his body for an autopsy (if he's dead). They'll also want to question the characters and will attempt to take them by force if the characters are not allied with Utopia or a legitimate (in their view) nova agency. Non-Utopian characters are well advised to make themselves scarce and lie low for a while after the incident.

Utopian characters still have to deal with Project Proteus agents, who want the incident covered up as quickly as possible and Harmattan moved to a secure facility. If the Storyteller wants, the first other novas on the scene could be Aberrants, Terats or agents of the Directive. They watched their conflict with Harmattan from a safe distance and either want to offer their help (possibly with some strings attached) or want to rescue Harmattan from the hands of the characters. That can lead to another conflict, especially when Team Tomorrow shows up, possibly starting a three-way (or more) fight over Harmattan.

If you prefer to keep the end of this scene fairly low-key (rather than leading into another nova battle), have Utopia and Proteus agents handle the situation quickly and efficiently and allow the characters (if not allied with Utopia) to escape without any difficulties. Utopia's PR machine covers up the majority of the incident, leaving only the storm reported in the media. See

the article on page 52 for the "official" version of what happened.

The Garden

A few days after Harmattan's breakdown, the characters receive some startling news. Antaeus, Project Utopia's star ecologist and one of its most powerful novas, has disappeared. The Storyteller should use the material on pages 53-55 to determine what the characters hear about the disappearance, depending on their allegiance and possible contacts. Utopia-allied characters find out a bit sooner than others, but Utopia is unable to keep the information from quickly filtering its way through the nova community and out to organizations like the Directive, although they do manage to keep Antaeus' absence out of the media for a time.

All that Utopia knows is Antaeus failed to show up for a meeting with the scientific staff at Project headquarters in Addis Ababa. There is no indication of how or when he left the grounds. With his various nova powers, particularly his Transmit ability — which allows him to travel through networks of plant roots — Antaeus could be virtually anywhere in the world.

Searching for Antaeus

Finding Antaeus becomes a top-priority, and characters associated with nearly any organization are assigned the task of tracking him down. Utopia and Project Proteus want to find Antaeus so they can at least determine why he left and what he's planning and, hopefully, return him to the fold. Other organizations would love to recruit Antaeus or at least ensure he doesn't go back to Utopia. And there's the specter hovering in the back of everyone's mind that Antaeus might not be entirely rational. With Harmattan's recent breakdown, the players should find themselves wondering if perhaps Antaeus has gone off the deep end. The kind of damage an out of control Antaeus could do makes the incident with Harmattan seem minor by comparison.

It's entirely up to the players to decide how they want to go about looking for Antaeus. There are very few leads. Even Utopia isn't certain when or how Antaeus left their headquarters. In fact, he did use his Transmit power to depart, but there are no means to trace his movements. His quarters (such as they are) at Utopia HQ contain nothing of interest. Antaeus very carefully covered his trail, and his Mega-Intelligence allowed him to ensure no clues to his plans were left behind. He has no real friends at Utopia, and even his co-workers had no inkling of Antaeus' plans. Higher-ups in Utopia know that Antaeus objected to the acceleration of Operation Genesis, and most assume that is his reason for leaving, but there is no way to be sure.

Antaeus has family living in Manchester, England, but he has little contact with them, usually simple personal correspondence, none of which offers any clue to his plans. Antaeus' mother and sisters relate that he has

seemed somewhat more distant of late but that he's always been quiet and reserved, even before he erupted. "Spencer keeps his own council," his mother says. "He always has."

Not long after the search for Antaeus begins, he makes his presence known in a fairly dramatic way.

Extending the Search

Storytellers who wish to can extend the search for Antaeus out over several scenes or even multiple stories, if desired. In this case, assume Antaeus spends some time contemplating his future plans, and give the characters a chance to track down a number of leads before he resurfaces in Djado. The characters can speak with Antaeus' family in England, track down former friends and associates of his and check out areas where Antaeus spent a great deal of time, such as Ethiopia and the Amazon Jungle.

The characters may run into obstacles along the way, such as former friends of Antaeus who are still involved with eco-terrorist organizations. They may think the characters' questions are a front for some other type of investigation. Suspicious governments, rival investigators and people with secrets to protect crop up along the way to keep things interesting. A more extended investigation may help give the characters (and the players) a more in-depth picture of Antaeus' background and personality. Resources from other *Aberrant* books, particularly *Aberrant: Project Utopia*, may be helpful here.

The Ghost Town Lives

A short time after his disappearance, Antaeus shows up in the abandoned town of Djado in Niger. This can be anywhere from a day to a week later, depending on how long the characters' investigation runs. Using his abilities, Antaeus causes a tropical oasis to spring up around the ghost town, covering an area of some 10 kilometers in radius and turning that region of the desert into fertile land.

The only witnesses to the transformation are a band of merchants leading their camels through the desert on their way to Agadez, but the information quickly reaches the media gathered to watch Operation Genesis, bringing it to the attention of the characters. If you want the characters to be the first on the scene, you can have them on hand to witness Antaeus' greening of the desert. Perhaps they find a clue at the last minute that leads them to Djado, or Antaeus might even invite them there himself to witness his handiwork and to demonstrate his power and authority in the area. Otherwise, the characters hear about Djado along with the rest of the world.

The media quickly descend on Djado along with the various factions looking for Antaeus. Project Utopia manages to convince the public that the oasis is simply part of Operation Genesis, and the media thinks it's a publicity stunt of some sort. In truth, it is, but not in the way they think. Antaeus wanted to get everyone's attention,



and he has it. Once the oasis is formed, Antaeus uses his powers to keep everyone outside of it, except for certain people he's willing to grant entrance. He knows full well that his break with Utopia will engender questions, and he's somewhat undecided about his next course of action. He's willing to meet with his fellow novas to give them a chance to make their cases to him.

Only certain novas are permitted to enter the garden oasis. This includes the characters. The trees and other plant life block everyone else, animating to seize intruders and throw them out. Anyone who manages to push past them is swallowed up by the ground itself and disgorged some 100 or so meters outside the oasis none the worse for wear. Antaeus' powers allow him to sense everything that happens inside the oasis, so there is no way to sneak inside short of teleporting. Since the various factions have an interest in staying on Antaeus' good side, they choose to respect the boundaries of his new domain, particularly since he allows representatives inside.

The outskirts of the oasis quickly become a veritable sea of reporters, Utopia personnel, representatives of corporations, national governments, environmental organizations, religious groups and various people just interested in seeing what is happening and perhaps catching a glimpse of some novas in action. The media swamps the characters as soon as they arrive unless they keep a very low profile. They're bombarded with questions: Are they working with Utopia? If not, then who are they working for? Do they know what's going on? Are they going inside the oasis and, if so, what are they planning to do there? And so forth. The media-hounds bark relentlessly until the characters do something forceful to get them to back off (which isn't likely to improve their PR) or they enter the oasis. The tall trees and grasses part to allow them entrance, and the noise and lights of the outside are quickly swallowed up in a vast, green and silent world.

Tea and Sympathy

A trail leads the characters through the heavy, tropical foliage toward the remains of the adobe-block town, now heavily covered with flowering vines and grasses. Characters who wander off the trail are guided back toward it by animated trees and vines. Characters who commit any acts of violence against the plant or animal life in the garden are immediately ejected in the manner described above. Assume Antaeus is powerful enough to this without much chance of the character resisting. Dr. Balmer is, after all, one of the most powerful novas on the planet, and the characters are operating on his turf (literally).

Despite the burning desert heat or freezing chill outside, inside the oasis is tropical and pleasant. The ground is rich, fertile, and covered with soft grasses and wildflowers. Tall trees tower up all around the characters, their leaves forming a cooling green canopy through which filters golden sunlight. Creepers and flowering

vines drape from the tree's massive branches, and brightly colored insects dart between them. Occasionally, the characters spot a snake or scorpion in the underbrush, but they are largely harmless to a group of novas. Stress the incredible contrast between the desolate desert, crowded with media trucks, satellite dishes and armed guards and the peaceful green serenity of the garden.

The trail leads to a small clearing amongst the crumbling adobe buildings of Djado. The clearing is ringed with an array of fruit-bearing trees, including orange, lemon, lime, fig and cherry. Roses and jasmine are in bloom and fill the air with a sweet scent. In the midst of the clearing stands a large, round "table" made of living wood rooted to the ground. The table's trunk forms its central "leg." Around the table are similar "chairs" shaped from living plants. Seated at the table or otherwise at ease around the clearing are Antaeus' other guests, people he has permitted to enter the garden to speak with him. Most of them are novas, and they represent all the factions the characters do not.

Of particular note is Count Raoul Orzaiz. He sits at the table sipping wine he brought with him, engaging in witty banter and pointing out a brightly colored snake making its way along the overhanging branch of an orange tree, while wondering aloud if Antaeus thought creating apple trees for his garden would have been too trite. Geisha, a member of Team Tomorrow Asia/Pacific, offers the characters tea from the service she has set out on the table. The other guests introduce themselves and do what they can to learn what the characters know about the current situation.

See the *Dramatis Personae* section for more information on the guests, and feel free to add or subtract from the "guest list" as desired. The "Goals" and "Roleplaying" notes for each of the *Dramatis Personae* provide hints on how to roleplay them. The characters themselves are considered representatives of whatever group they are allied with. If they are independents, then Antaeus wants to speak with them to get the "independent viewpoint."

When the characters arrive in the grove, they have time to meet and talk to the various other people there. Feel free to have some other guests arrive after the characters do, and play out the scene for as long as it seems interesting. This is an excellent opportunity for the characters to meet up with people they'd probably never meet on friendly terms otherwise and for more sheltered characters to experience a sample of the diversity of allegiance and opinion that is the nova community.

The Baselines

The guest list also includes at least four baseline characters. Antaeus believes a baseline may have just as much to say to him (if not more) than his fellow novas. Despite their various differences, the baselines tend to huddle together in the gathering, their ordinariness standing out in dull contrast to the grace, beauty and

confidence of the novas.

A group of three baselines represent three major environmentalist groups: Harry Turnbull (Greenpeace), Maggie Cunningham (Earth First!) and Dan Ramirez (The Sierra Club). Turnbull is a tall, bearded bear of a man who's been with Greenpeace for some 15 years. Cunningham is in her early 30s and is by far the most radical of the group. She and Turnbull used to date casually some 10 years ago, but they haven't really spoken in the past five years. Ramirez is the most conservative of the three. Although still devoted to the ideas of environmentalism, he believes in working "within the system."

The fourth baseline in the garden Marabout Aga, a Nigerois mullah who came to see the miracle at Djado for himself and felt drawn to enter the garden. He is quite awed by everything he has seen here and is not entirely certain why he is among such strange company. Aga speaks French, Arabic and a few words of English. He is simultaneously relieved to find someone to talk to and nervous about talking to novas, Allah's chosen. It is entirely too close to talking to an angel for his comfort.

Antaeus Appears

Allow the characters to mingle and interact with the other guests for as long as things seem interesting. Give the characters plenty of chances to talk with different people and find out a little something about them and their views. This is a prime opportunity for the characters to learn about the different factions of the Aberrant world.

Charmed, I'm Sure....

This entire scene is packed with novas with social Mega-Attributes, oozing charm out of every pore. If the characters aren't social powerhouses themselves, there exists a temptation to have people like Geisha or Count Orzaiz ride roughshod over them. Before the characters know it, they've agreed to do just about anything for their new "friend," up to and including betraying their organization and their principles.

It's important to resist this temptation. The story is about the characters making decisions, not being hoodwinked or taken in. It's possible one of the other novas might try to sway the characters over to their side of things. In this case, you should roleplay the encounter and suggest how the characters feel about things ("Orzaiz is making a lot of sense"), but let the players choose for themselves. If need be, allow characters to spend a Willpower point to "shake off" the effects of another character's Mega-Attributes and think clearly.

On the other hand, feel free to show off the novas using their abilities to push around the baselines in the group, even unintentionally. Try as they might, the baselines are simply no match for a Mega-Social nova. They'll find themselves agreeing with Geisha, Orzaiz or Sophia Rousseau (even one after the other) despite their best efforts, at least until Antaeus shows up.

Running a LARP

One interesting option for playing out the scene in the garden is to run it as a Live-Action Roleplaying, or LARP, event. In a LARP, the players take the idea of playing in character one step further and actually act out the actions of their character, much like improvisational theatre. The primary restrictions are that no actual combat or physical contact takes place during a LARP and that the players should take care to play away from distractions or any place where they might confuse or disturb bystanders. If the group has the opportunity, a wooded area outdoors makes the perfect setting (provided it's not a busy area and the weather cooperates).

In this case, each participant (including the Storyteller) takes the role of one of the characters representing the various factions. The players can run the characters described in the *Dramatis Personae* section, or they can create their own. Rather than all being part of the same group, the characters may represent different factions, each with their own agendas. The Storyteller should take the role of Antaeus and serve as an invisible "referee" at the start of the story before putting in an appearance later on. The players can mingle and talk with each other freely, trying to find out information or make secret alliances.

The Storyteller adjudicates any use of nova abilities, using the traits of the involved characters as a guideline. Keep in mind that Antaeus' *pax verditas* forbids fighting or using nova powers on others within the garden, and he enforces it by ejecting the offender from the garden (and the game). This should keep the amount of game mechanics required to an absolute minimum.

For further information about staging and running LARP events, including more detailed rules and game systems, consult the *Mind's Eye Theatre* series of LARP games from White Wolf.

When things are cooling down (or looking like they might get out of control) Antaeus puts in his appearance, rising up from the ground to one side of the table. He apologizes for being late, saying only that "other matters" required his attention. He asks the gathered guests to please seat themselves at the table and waits for them to do so before sitting himself.

"Welcome to my humble abode," Antaeus says. "You've all come here because you have something to say to me, whether you know it or not. I am willing to hear you out, but I must insist on certain requirements. First, this garden is a place of peace, *pax verditas*, or 'green peace,' if you'll pardon the pun. I will not tolerate any conflict here. Whatever your problems may be outside this place, here you will keep the peace, or you will answer to me.

"Secondly, I will speak with each of you individually. You are welcome to remain here and enjoy the garden while you wait. You may enjoy the fruits available



here, but I ask that you not harm any of the plants and animals. I will know if you do, and I will take action to protect this place.

"Lastly, I would like to say that I regret the unfortunate circumstances that led to my break with Project Utopia, but I feel there is no other choice. Utopia required the acceleration of the project to terraform this land, against my advice. For too long, I have ignored the larger implications of Utopia's actions in order to continue with my work. I can ignore them no longer, but I require information in order to make a choice. That is why you are here, to give me the different points of view necessary to make an informed decision."

Antaeus rises from the table like a king. "I will send for each of you in turn," he says. Then, he sinks back into the ground and disappears.

Agendas and Events

What happens when the characters are called to speak with Antaeus and what happens while they wait are largely up to the demands of the situation and the actions of the characters. Some possibilities are given here, but they are by no means the only ones. Feel free to improvise some additional situations or to adapt the story to fit your own group and series.

Some possible events that can happen while the characters are waiting include:

- Different people try to get the characters to support whatever pitch they want to make to Antaeus, be it

convincing him of corruption within Utopia, to return to the Utopian fold or to support *The Null Manifesto*. This is especially likely if the characters are independents. People may issue veiled threats and promises to get the characters to cooperate.

- Someone tries to provoke the characters into violence in order to get them expelled from Antaeus' garden and out of the way. The characters have to control their tempers and engage in a battle of words and ideas, not fists and quantum powers.

- One of the baselines (Maggie Cunningham is a good choice) rails against the novas for their behavior. This is either because they want to sway Antaeus away from what he should be doing (at least in the baseline's opinion) or because of the way the novas use their abilities ("You have the power to save the world and what do you use it for? To make yourself rich?"). Several of the novas present (particularly Count Orzaiz) do *not* care to be taken to task by a baseline nobody in front of their peers. They may threaten or intimidate the baseline into backing down.

- Someone tries to seduce one of the characters. This could be a legitimate romantic interest or a coldly motivated play for influence over the character. It gets even more interesting when the advances come from one of the baselines in the group.

- One of the guests (most likely Rousseau or Orzaiz) brings up the fate of Harmattan and wonders aloud what

became of him. Since the characters were directly involved, they have a chance to tell everyone the truth, but whatever they say is carefully noted by all present, particularly Geisha. A good time to discuss the matter may be while they're away talking to Antaeus. This could lead to further discussion of what the Aberrants and the Teragen know about Project Proteus.

- The stress of the whole situation, coupled with the presence of so many novas, causes one of the baselines to erupt, becoming a nova (Aga is an interesting choice for this). The eruption may be a violent one, forcing the novas to work together to "midwife" the new nova safely. Then, of course, there is the question of what this new nova will do with his or her abilities, with representatives of all the major factions there, hoping for a new recruit. This option is also good for introducing a new character into the player group.

Talking With Antaeus

The characters should be summoned to speak with Antaeus somewhere in the middle of the other guests, giving them a chance to mingle and talk before and afterward. Antaeus causes his face to appear on a nearby tree or on the ground to summon each person, telling them to follow the sound of his voice through the forest. Anyone not summoned who tries to follow along finds the way blocked by tree limbs and foliage.

The trail leads deep into the heart of the forest oasis, amongst the ruins of the buildings of Djado. There Antaeus waits, standing as patiently as the trees surrounding him. He welcomes the characters and asks them if they would like any further refreshment. Then he says "So, what do you think of my little garden here?" by way of opening things up for the characters to talk.

Let the characters take the lead in the conversation. Antaeus wants to hear what they have to say. He's particularly interested in their opinions regarding Utopia, *The Null Manifesto*, Operation Genesis and what they see as the duties and responsibilities of novas (if any). What are they doing with their powers, and why? Do they feel fulfilled by it? Try getting the players to articulate what their characters believe and think and feel in character. Have Antaeus play devil's advocate and point out flaws in their reasoning, making them defend their positions.

While playing Antaeus in this scene, keep in mind the following things:

- Antaeus is Mega-Intelligent, one of the smartest novas on the planet. It should be very difficult for the characters to trip him up, at least when it comes to things like facts and logic, and *nobody* knows more than he does about ecology or terraforming.

- Antaeus is not hostile or opposed to the characters. He wants direct, honest answers to his questions. In many ways, Antaeus is searching for peers to speak their minds to him.

- Antaeus will not commit to a position at this time. If the characters offer a wonderfully persuasive argument, they win Antaeus' respect (and possibly even friendship), but he's very gun-shy about joining any cause after his break with Utopia, and he feels the need to take charge of his own destiny. If the characters are already doing this, he tells them he admires them for it. If they're not, he tells them that perhaps they should consider who is really in charge of their lives.

Wrap-Up

When all is said and done and Antaeus has finished speaking with all his guests, he appears to them once again in the "green room" where they've been waiting. "Thank you all," he says. "I appreciate the thoughts and ideas you have shared with me, and I have come to a decision. My dream has always been to make the desolate places of the world green and to save the Earth from the greed and short-sightedness of humanity. We novas are given a great gift, the power to make our dreams a reality, and a great responsibility, to make sure our dreams are worthy ones — that we do not fall victim to the same short-sightedness that led to the poisoning and devastation of our world.

"I have chosen not to return to Project Utopia but to remain in the utopia of my own creation. I will follow my dream and work to bring life and hope back to this land, safely and in the fullness of time. I hope that my goals and yours and those of Utopia can coincide in the future. Farewell."

With that, Antaeus sinks into the ground and disappears. The characters are welcome to stay in the garden for as long as they like (so long as they continue to respect Antaeus' wishes), but the others quickly begin to break up and depart, making their own farewells. The characters step out of the shelter of the foliage and back into a mob of media cameras, microphones and people shouting questions at them. They also have to deal with the consequences of any of their actions in the garden, including any deals they might have made with the other guests.

Not long thereafter, Project Utopia announces that Antaeus has taken "an extended leave of absence" from the organization in order to personally supervise Operation Genesis, which will progress at a slower rate "to ensure the safety and prosperity of the Sahara region and all its people."

Dramatis Personae

Most of the characters in the section are not given game statistics, since the characters will only encounter them under the aegis of Antaeus' *pax verditas*. General information is provided regarding their abilities.

Mashala "Harmattan" Kader



Background: Mashala Kader was born and raised in Niger, where his father ran a small business transporting and selling salt, using camels like his ancestors had done for centuries. For most of his life, Kader knew little of the outside world, except what he heard on the radio or read in magazines. That changed dramatically when he erupted during a violent sandstorm, gaining power over the wind and sand. He immediately went to Addis Ababa and applied to Project Utopia, where he received training in controlling and using his abilities. Kader basked in the adulation of the people back home, proud to have their own nova hero, and looked forward to using his abilities to make a name for himself. He applied to be assigned to Operation Genesis and was quite proud when Utopia chose him. Unfortunately, Kader's devotion to learning to harness his powers drove him too far. He's acquired a considerable level of Taint, which has driven him over the edge into madness.

Description: An eager and earnest young man of Tuareg (Middle Eastern) descent. His slender frame belies his amazing endurance. He always wears the distinctive indigo-dyed turban of his Tuareg heritage.

Roleplaying Hints: Completely paranoid, you see enemies in every shadow. You've realized that novas are specially gifted by Allah but that agents of Shaitan are everywhere, seeking to hunt you down and kill you, like they did Slider and other novas. Trust no one.

Nature: Architect

Allegiance: Project Utopia

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 2, Charisma 3

Abilities: Arts (calligraphy) 1, Athletics 3, Awareness 2,

Brawl 2, Endurance 5, Etiquette 1, Rapport 1, Resistance 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 1, Survival (desert) 4

Backgrounds: Node 4

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 5, Taint 6 (Paranoid Psychosis)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina ••••• (Adaptability, Hardbody, Resiliency), Mega-Wits •• (Multitasking)

Quantum Powers: Elemental Mastery (Sand) •••• (Crush, Lethal Blast, Propel, Storm)

Spencer "Antaeus" Balmer

Background: Spencer Balmer was born and raised in the English industrial city of Manchester, one of several children in his family. He spent time in his younger days at university and afterward as a member of a number of ecological preservation groups, including some with particularly radical politics. He helped fight against what he saw as the slow and sure destruction of the environment by uncaring governments and corporations.

Balmer's eruption transformed his views on eco-activism. Endowed with vast intelligence and empathy for the living ecosphere, he suddenly found himself with the power to stop protesting about the destruction of the environment and actually do something to prevent it and even reverse the damage. He joined Project Utopia under the name "Antaeus," after the giant in Greek mythology who drew his strength from the Earth. He masterminded Utopia's ecological initiatives, projects that repaired the ozone layer, cleaned up Earth's oceans and scrubbed the atmosphere. His crowning achievement was the terraforming of Ethiopia, turning a barren wasteland into a new Garden of Eden.

More recently, Antaeus has developed doubts about Utopia. Although it has done good work, he's seen the organization he joined become mired in scandal and politics. Utopia's acceleration of Operation Genesis was the final straw that pushed him to seriously consider something he'd been thinking about for a while: With all his abilities, does he really need Utopia in order to save the environment?

Abilities: Antaeus is one of the world's most powerful novas. His abilities are primarily based around a deep connection with the living Earth: soil, plants, entire ecospheres. Antaeus' own body appears made out of earth and living plants. He can control plants, making them grow rapidly and animating them. He can travel through the earth along a network of plant roots, and he can sense things through his connection to the natural world. Antaeus also has a vast intelligence, especially in the area of ecology, and a deep intuitive understanding of the intricacies of any ecosystem.

Description: A giant figure made up of earth and vegetation, with gray hair and a full beard, green skin shot through with root-like veins and black eyes with green pupils. Antaeus wears little, if any, clothing.

Goals: Antaeus' current goals are to slow Utopia's terraforming operation in the Sahara to a pace he feels

is safe and to determine his next course of action regarding his relations with Utopia and other organizations in the world. His overriding goal is to use his abilities to protect and improve the health and well-being of the natural world. He has little interest in personal power or aggrandizement. He prefers to achieve his goals using non-violent means.

Roleplaying Hints: You're a remarkably intelligent and reasonable man and very patient. You understand that everyone isn't necessarily up to your level of comprehension, and while that can be frustrating, you also acknowledge that everyone does have a unique point of view to offer. You always listen carefully before responding and consider your words before you speak. You radiate a feeling of peace and serenity, although tinged somewhat with frustration from your recent problems.

Ichiko "Geisha" Iko



Background: Ichiko was born and raised in Japan. She was an ideal child and took training as a geisha while still a young girl. She was quite successful in her work as an entertainer, but unfortunately, she overheard some things she should not have about the Yakuza's Nakato gumi. When Yakuza soldiers came to her home to kill her, she erupted. She quietly convinced the Yakuza to leave her unharmed. She immediately applied to Project Utopia and left Japan (and the Nakato gumi) behind. She wanted to join Team Tomorrow, and Utopia (like everyone else) has a hard time refusing Ichiko whatever she wants.

For more information on Geisha, see **Aberrant: Project Utopia**.

Abilities: Geisha has considerable Mega-Charismatic and Mega-Manipulative abilities, along with Empathic Manipulation and a few other Mega-Attributes. She's one of the most persuasive, convincing and likable people in the entire world.

Description: A slight Japanese woman of delicate and surpassing beauty, dressed in the traditional robes of a geisha. She moves with the grace of a willow, and her slightest smile seems to light up a room.

Goals: Ichiko believes strongly in Utopia's goals and the duty of all novas to use their abilities for the betterment of humanity. She respects Antaeus and considers him an honorable man, even if she doesn't claim to understand him. She's certain there must be some misunderstanding between Antaeus and Utopia that she can smooth over. She looks out for Utopia's interests above all else, since what's good for Utopia is good for the world, in her opinion.

Roleplaying Hints: Honor and proper behavior are all-important to you. You dislike novas with no sense of responsibility. You consider the Aberrants and the Teragen little more than criminals, although you're far too gracious and diplomatic to ever let your true feelings show. Maintain your good manners no matter what happens.

Count Raoul Orzaiz

Background: The scion of a noble family, Raoul Orzaiz is perhaps the most charming and pleasant member of the Teragen. He is a member of the international jet set, seen in all the finest places in Europe and around the world, particularly the Amp Room in Ibiza. The Count's high profile and considerable charms have thus far protected him, despite his very public support of *The Null Manifesto*. Opponents of the Teragen believe eliminating Orzaiz would do nothing but create a popular martyr for the Teragen cause, something they're not currently willing to risk.

For more information on Count Orzaiz, see the **Aberrant Storytellers Screen**.

Abilities: Orzaiz is, according to his own words, "an accomplished athlete of [his] species", having some measure of all three physical Mega-Attributes. His most prominent abilities however, are his social Mega-Attributes, particularly his Mega-Manipulation. He also has a high degree of Premonition, contributing to his unflappable nature. He always seems to know what's going to happen next.

Description: A handsome, dashing man with a touch of roguishness, Orzaiz has a bald (shaven) head and a neatly trimmed mustache and goatee. He's always impeccably dressed, usually in a stylish suit and tie, and appears at ease in every situation.

Goals: To Orzaiz, the fact that novas are superior to baselines and shouldn't be governed or limited by them is just that, a clear and obvious fact. He wants to show Antaeus that same fact and hopes this break with Utopia is a sign that Antaeus has finally woken up to what Utopia really is — a collection of baselines who think they know what's best for the world and for novas. If he cannot sway Antaeus to the Teragen cause, he hopes to at least find out what his intentions are, and whether or

not they run counter to those of him and his associates.

Roleplaying Hints: Exude charm and poise from every pore. You're congenial toward others, while subtly manipulating them and pumping them for any information they might have about the current situation. You do your best to disabuse others of any notions they might have of Terats as "terrorists" or "criminals." ("Baseline terms, entirely meaningless to us.")

Sophia Rousseau



Background: The co-founder and leader of the Aberrants, precious little can be said for sure about Sophia Rousseau. She's a powerful and influential woman, a formidable presence. She seems to know everyone in the nova community, and many people seem to know her as well, although some can't seem to recall where or when they met her for the first time. She moves among various social circles with ease and grace. Of late, Madame Rousseau has spent much of her time working with the Aberrants to expose the conspiracy within Project Utopia.

For more information about Sophia Rousseau, see **Exposé: Aberrants**.

Abilities: Like her background, Sophia Rousseau's full abilities remain a mystery. She clearly possesses some social Mega-Attributes and some energy projection abilities (which she used to literally vaporize an Australian XWF fighter who had the temerity to assault her). She also exhibits a kind of "psychic static" that makes it impossible for telepaths to sense her true thoughts or feelings.

Description: A handsome, elegant woman with short, auburn hair and somewhat sharp features, usually dressed in a style and manner perfect for the situation, with just enough of the eccentric about her to set her apart from the crowd.

Goals: To Rousseau and the Aberrants, Antaeus' defection is a golden opportunity that might indicate sup-

port for the Aberrant movement at some of the highest levels of Utopia. At the very least, Rousseau hopes to gain Antaeus' support, which might swing other novas over to the Aberrants. The mysterious Rousseau plays her cards very close to her chest in this story. She's charming and pleasant but not very forthcoming about herself or her plans. If the characters are not Aberrants, Rousseau may try convincing them of the conspiracy within Project Utopia. After what happened to Harmattan, and after hearing Antaeus' reasons for leaving the Project, the characters might even believe her.

Roleplaying Hints: You're charming, pleasant and insightful. You do your best to build bridges between people, particularly when it comes to uniting novas and alerting them to the danger growing inside Project Utopia. You're passionate about your cause, but you don't allow that passion to cloud your judgment. You enjoy playing the role of "mystery woman" and do your best to intrigue others without showing your hand.

Illyana "Pravda" Zorovich



Background: Born in Russia before the fall of the Soviet Union, Illyana Zorovich lived with her family on one of the country's many collective farms, scratching out a meager existence and living on government subsidies. Zorovich lived through the fall of the communist government and the eventual rise of the Russian Confederation. She worked as a schoolteacher before her M-R node erupted while she was engaged in a fierce argument with her father, allowing her to read his mind and learn about some of the things he'd been through first-hand.

Zorovich immediately came to the attention of the Russian government and the Directive. She worked as a Directive agent briefly, using the name "Pravda" (Russian for "truth"). Then, she realized she could earn far

greater rewards with her abilities and left to become a free agent. She came to work for the DeVries Agency just over two years ago and has become one of their most skilled recruiters and trainers of novas. She moved her family out of Russia to a home in Finland and visits them regularly.

Abilities: Illyana Zorovich is a powerful telepath with the ability to control the minds of others. She has Mega-Perception (with the Quantum Attunement enhancement), Mega-Wits (with the Natural Empath enhancement) and Mega-Charisma. She dislikes using her Domination ability unless absolutely necessary to protect herself or others.

Description: An attractive woman in her early 30s, with black hair in a short, businesslike cut and ice-blue eyes that seem to penetrate deeply. She has a slight Russian accent but speaks English (and several other languages) fluently.

Goals: Acquiring the services of a nova like Antaeus would be an amazing coup for DeVries. Zorovich's job is to convince Antaeus that DeVries offers him the best of both worlds: the support and resources of an organization coupled with the freedom to choose his work and his employers. This is the solution that worked for her, and she sincerely thinks it should work for other novas as well. If she can't talk Antaeus into an exclusive contract with DeVries, Zorovich at least hopes to get him to agree to consider working for the agency on a freelance basis from time to time.

Roleplaying Hints: You tend to look beyond the surface of people's actions and appearance to see their real motives, thoughts and feelings. You think novas are entitled to use their abilities to make a living however they please, rather than working as political pawns for organizations like the Directive or Utopia. People you can't read (like Sophia Rousseau) make you uncomfortable.

Monique "Zephyr" Arrens



Background: Monique Arrens was born in Vietnam of a French father and a Vietnamese mother. She was raised in Europe and took advantage of her opportunities. One of them was the opportunity to model for an important fashion agency. She became an overnight sensation, plastered across magazines, billboards and video screens around the world. Arrens earned a degree in business management and started her own modeling agency. She also indulged in a number of dangerous hobbies, including skydiving. She erupted when her parachute failed to operate one day, controlling the winds to slow her fall and allow her to fly. She immediately sought to capitalize on the profit potential of her abilities and accepted a job to work for Novelty Consulting in Hong Kong. She's been one of the company's star coordinators and recruiters since then.

Abilities: Arrens has the ability to control and command the wind (Elemental Anima), coupled with a formidable personality (Mega-Manipulation) and a keen intellect (Mega-Intelligence). Her Mega-Wits allow her to think quickly on her feet and react to changing circumstances, and she's a skilled businesswoman.

Description: A striking Eurasian woman with shoulder-length black hair and green eyes (a cosmetic alteration, her real eye-color is brown), she favors flowing clothes of green, blue and violet, which she can stir and flutter with a carefully timed breeze for dramatic effect.

Goals: Although Arrens might appear to be something of an "airhead" (literally), she's actually quite sharp when it comes to business matters and an able negotiator, or else Amanda Wu would never have entrusted her with so delicate a mission. Like DeVries, Novelty would love to have Antaeus on the payroll, even more so since Novelty has more of a reputation as a scientific and technical consulting firm (something she'll play up to Antaeus). Zephyr is more than willing to chat with the characters and may even hit them up if she thinks they have talents that might be useful to Novelty.

Roleplaying Hints: You use every ability and opportunity to your advantage. You prefer it when your opponents underestimate you because it gives you an edge. You can put aside your ego if that helps to get you what you want. You also love a challenge, and you live for the danger and excitement of being a nova. You're always willing to try new things.

Cernunnos

Background: Little is known about the early life of the man who calls himself Cernunnos, after an ancient Celtic tribal god. His accent suggests he's from the British Isles, and he spends much of his time there. Cernunnos is the leader of a neo-pagan nature cult in England. He claims to be an avatar, a living manifestation of the Horned God of the woods. The Circle of the Horned God is famous (or infamous) for its devotion to ecology, belief in magic and support of personal freedoms, including the cult's regular rituals conducted "sky-clad" (in the nude). Rumors of moonlit orgies and opportunities for



worshippers to "join" with the Horned God abound. Cernunnos merely smiles when they're brought up and suggests the questioners might want to attend a ritual. "They're quite... liberating," he says.

Abilities: Cernunnos has number of nova abilities in keeping with his role as an avatar of the Horned God, including Mega-Strength, Mega-Stamina, Mega-Charisma and Animal Mastery.

Description: Cernunnos is a tall, powerfully built man wearing a long, hooded green cloak over what looks like a Renaissance Faire costume. He has shaggy brown hair and a short beard, along with glowing green eyes and a pair of antlers sprouting from his forehead.

Goals: Cernunnos admires (even envies) Antaeus' bond with the natural world and wants to convince Antaeus that he is more than mortal, to take up his responsibilities as manifestation of the divine. Cernunnos sincerely believes he is the avatar of a god and that the abilities of all novas are magical in nature. To his mind, the manipulation of quantum forces is simply a new name for what the ancient peoples have always known as magic.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a god, and you expect to be treated accordingly by mortals. You know that some do not believe, and you pity them. You have a tremendous lust for life and all the pleasures it brings, particularly running, feasting, drinking and lovemaking. You also have a deep reverence for the natural world and its cycles.

Shawna "Fauna" McShane

Background: Originally hailing from the New Orleans area, "Fauna" McShane is one of the founding members of the nova eco-terrorist group Greenwar. The group's stated intention is "to do whatever is necessary to protect the environment from the nations, corporations and individuals that have declared war on it." Fauna is wanted for charges resulting from her activities in several nations, including Brazil, Japan, France and Mexico.

Project Utopia considers her and Greenwar a "low priority" problem in comparison to groups like the Teragen and the Aberrants, so there's been little direct conflict between them (so far).



Abilities: Fauna has the ability to communicate with animals and is a powerful shapeshifter. She can only assume animal forms and characteristics using her shapeshifting ability, but she can turn into almost any sort of animal and gain its various abilities.

Description: Fauna's true appearance is that of a slim Creole woman with dark, wavy hair and dark eyes, but she usually has at least a few animal characteristics like fur, feathers instead of hair, scaly skin (often brightly marked or patterned), cat-like eyes, sharp teeth, claws or a tail. Her form shifts slightly in response to her mood, becoming more animalistic when she gets angry, afraid or upset. She sometimes wears a brief eufiber bodysuit that can shift into a collar or leg-band on her animal form, but she just as often goes without any clothing at all, covering her nudity with fur or other creations of her shapeshifting power when necessary.

Goals: Fauna's number one goal is the protection of the environment. She's devoted her life to saving the natural world from the short-sightedness and greed of humanity. She's killed before to achieve her goals, and she'll willingly do so again. She has mixed feelings toward Antaeus. On the one hand, she is in awe of his abilities and his rapport with nature and of what he's achieved. On the other hand, she can't help but see Antaeus as something of a sellout. He compromised his once fierce ecological principles to work for Project Utopia. She hopes his break with Utopia means Antaeus intends to take a stronger stance on ecological matters, and she would like nothing better than to have him join Greenwar's cause. With Antaeus helping them, there would be no limit to what they could accomplish.

Roleplaying Hints: You're fierce and primal but with a tender and nurturing side that surprises many people. You feel nothing but contempt for those who rape and poison the Earth and nearly as much for the people who stand by

and allow it to happen. You admire Antaeus and novas like him, but you feel that most novas aren't doing everything they can to help the world; most are too interested in lining their own pockets and finding new ways to get laid.



Gabriel's Final Broadcast

Houston, Texas, March 21, 2008

Many of you call me a nova. Scientists talk knowingly of a special part of my brain which grants me my powers. If that is so, why can one person fly and shot bolts of fire, while another can heal the sick with a touch? Those you call novas have been touched by the hand of God and called to service. Should it surprise any of you that the first modern novas appeared a short time before the millennium? The last days are not here yet, but they will arrive soon. Novas are merely the first ones who have been granted the opportunity to serve in our Lord's army. We know our Lord as the Quantum Unity. In the past, others have called him Allah, Jehovah and many other names, but He is always the same, and His mission remains unchanged.

I stand before you today to call you all to my side. The Quantum Unity is preparing for a vast and terrible battle against the forces of darkness. These forces are all around us. War, greed and cruelty abound, and all that practice these sins serve the Entropic Lords of Hell. Even now, some that have been touched by the Unity have renounced his call and use their powers for gain and petty violence. Come to me now, and renounce all wickedness. Walk into the atomic light of the Divine Quantum Unity, and be healed. Work with me to set the stage for our mutual ascension.

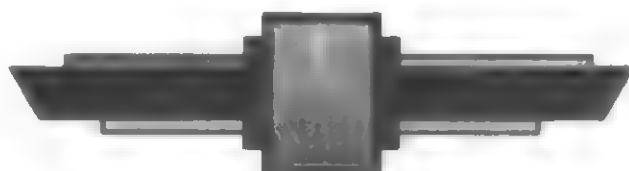
As evidence of His divine grace, He has given me the power to heal your worldly ills. However, do not let that distract you from the greater purpose. Only the Quantum Unity can heal your soul and redeem your sins. Purge the evil, the doubt and the impure resonances from your body and your soul, and ready yourself for the coming battle.

Project Utopia Surveillance Tape

December 14, 2009, Boulder City, Nevada, Broadcast statement by Gabriel Melchior

I ask you to look into your hearts and renounce the evil that you serve. They clothe themselves in raiments of splendor and good deeds, but they are murderous vipers who seek to corrupt humanity and keep us from attaining our apocalyptic unity with the Godhead. If you do not know of their evils, listen, and I will explain. If you serve them out of fear, then do not believe that your service will save you, either from their tortures or from the eternal damnation you will soon face.

I was righteous and holy. I displayed the glorious power of our Savior to all who would see. The evil ones feared my power and took me into a foul captivity to silence my message. The twin-headed serpent of Proteus and Triton locked me in a cell and tormented my body and my spirit. When I refused to recant, they used drugs and dark magics to cloud my will and placed scales over my eyes. Then, they set me to work on their satanic plan, making a false Eden in the desert. But lo, my torments and exertions were not in vain. While my mouth was silenced, my soul cried out to the Divine Quantum Unity and in His time, He answered. His holy light broke their magics and purged their foul drugs from my body. His will set me free to go and proclaim the evil amidst us. Renounce your dark masters! Join me in my holy light and be free!



GABRIEL

Know also that I am not the only one they held in torment and captivity. In their brazen citadel in the desert, there are others whose souls cried out to me during my captivity. I also heard the dark ramblings of the demons who ran their cursed castle. The evil ones plan to enslave all of the chosen one. They fear His holy mark and the miracles His power brings. They used drugs to sicken the bodies and souls of all who they captured. All who speak against them are silenced or slain.

They killed young Jennifer, and now, they surround my flock and me. I can see your heart, you are not a demon. Turn your back on evil before it is too late. Help me show the world the true face these serpents wear. If you are full of fear and your faith is weak, let me help you and guide you. Let me broadcast my message to all the peoples of the Earth, to warn them of this danger. The final battle between Gog and Magog approaches. If you do not choose your side, you may be forced into serving the Evil One.

Know also that if you do knowingly choose evil over good there shall be a reckoning beyond all measure. If any seek to harm me or my flock or to take us into captivity again, I will bring the apocalypse! All who hold evil in their hearts will sicken and die. The rivers will run red with their blood, and the air will reek with the stench of their corrupt and rotting flesh. The servants of evil will be cast down into the fiery pit, and their minions will be cleansed from the Earth. Oppose me, and you will fall in the coming battle.

From a Telecom Virus Message

Distributed by Maria Jimenez to Selected Aberrants

Our associates inside Project Utopia report that not only is Gabriel Melchior alive, he has been held in captivity for almost a year, and has recently escaped. Data is scanty, but it looks like he was being used, presumably against his will, to aid Operation Genesis. Utopia has sicced the dogs on him, and he's gone to ground in his church's headquarters near Boulder City, Nevada. This message is going out to everyone who might have access to the situation. In addition to rescuing this man from what sounds a whole lot like slavery, we need his info. He may know a great deal about what's going on in Utopia's back rooms. He's already claimed that Utopia was responsible for Slider's death and has mentioned Proteus. We don't know how he obtained any of this, but he may have some seriously deep info. However, the reports we have intercepted make it sound like his ordeal may have left him unbalanced and that he is even more powerful than when he vanished. Utopia's people sound majorly scared, and so does he. If he's pushed too far, we may have some sort of Jonestown on our hands, or Proteus may simply try to make it look like a Jonestown. Either way, we need to get in and get him to someplace safe.

Update to Previous Message

The current buzz at Utopia is that Melchior's a dangerous madman and that if he's not stopped he'll unleash some sort of deadly plague. The scariest thing about this story is that it might just be true. Given what we know of some of Proteus' activities, they may well have driven this guy right over the edge. He was already into all sorts of apocalyptic crap before they nabbed him, and a year at their tender mercies likely hasn't made him any calmer or more stable. Our best guess is that Proteus will likely try to cap him ASAP. They're not going to want word one about this mess to leak out. Since we already know about it, I'm betting they'll try to clean this whole mess up and not leave any witnesses. Not only do we need to get this guy away from them, we also need to make sure that he doesn't start the next Black Death. Of course, the whole plague scare could just be a smoke screen by Utopia, but everyone who manages to get on-site should act as if it's true until they have proof that this threat is a fabrication. Remember that Gabriel Melchior is one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful, biomanip on record. We have no idea what his full capabilities could be.



Welcome to OpNet

Excerpts From the Encrypted Teragen OpNet List

From: Geryon@avenger.com
To: <list address autodeleted>
Subject: **Free the Slaves**

Well, isn't this a lovely little nightmare we seem to be having. The Bogarts just brought us concrete proof that Gabriel Melchior did not self-destruct last May. Instead Utopia kidnapped him — kidnapped him — and was holding him captive for the past year. It sounds like the Project was afraid of just how powerful he was becoming. I can't say I'm the slightest bit surprised. Well boys and girls, Gabe flew the coop over to the States and is currently surrounded by a whole mess of Utopia minions and a bunch of baseline government thugs in Nevada of all the God-forsaken places. If they're that afraid of this gentleman, then we want him too. Either he knows a whole lot of juicy dirt, or he's tougher than we previously thought. Either way, if we can get in and recruit him, we may have someone really special.

Utopia talks endlessly about responsibility, trust and respecting the rights of zips. How about the rights of novas? Gabriel Melchior, a powerful and publicly known nova, was kidnapped under the noses of his followers and held like a rat in their labs. Who knows what they did to him? Some baselines call us monsters, and while they may have a point, at least we don't keep our own as slaves and prisoners for no reason other than fear and greed. We must bring Gabriel Melchior to safety and show the world that anyone who attempts to enslave novas will face the consequences for their acts.

Vigilance!

From: Carthage@hotsite.com
To: <list address autodeleted>
Subject: **Re: Free The Slaves**

All right people, let's get cracking on this one. If baselines can't enslave each other, why should the One Race be treated differently? While rescuing this poor sap is a high priority, we also need to find out what sort of prison camp Utopia was keeping him in and who else it may be holding there. If Utopia manages to kill him before we can get to him, everything he knows dies with him. The Project is likely to be getting ready to aim the big guns at him pretty fast. We need to move in, snatch him and head out. Until he is safe, everyone involved should avoid any unnecessary conflicts with Utopia or government forces. In case anyone is interested, a contact in the US government just spilled that Utopia has told the feds that The Miracle is planning to unleash some sort of major plague. Let's give this guy an A for effort, but, I'm not sure I want to be living in *The Stand*. Hopefully we can talk him down. He's likely just making threats since he's currently trapped and without allies. Hopefully, once we get him calmed down, he'll rethink his plans.

Let me know if you're with me.

Rattler



Welcome to OpNet

**__HYPERLINK //Interrupt //Interrupt_Message
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Subject: The Miracle (was Free The Slaves)

Synapse here-

I just hacked Triton's database on this hotshot. They weren't kidding about these plagues. Our man Gabe is one powerful hombre. We really want this sucker; he could let us transform a nation or maybe even terraform that section of the moon we've been talking about using. However, right now he's pretty darn peeved. These figures aren't crap. If he wanted to, he could wipe out as many as a third of all baselines. Now, I know many of you might think that snuffing all the baselines isn't too bad an idea. Heck, I've thought about it myself. This isn't the same thing. Most of them would survive. While things would be pretty trashed for a while, they breed like rats, and they can regroup damn fast when pressed. Take a moment to think what life would be like if Jane and John Zip just found out that one of us killed a third of the other zips. They'd be hunting us through the streets like dogs and hanging us from lampposts. Sure, Mal and all those flashy folks would be too tough to touch. What about the rest of us? A few bullets don't mean a lot to me, but those of you with real bodies might find them problematic. If we don't get this guy mellowed out, we're looking at nova target shooting as the next Olympic sport. Sure, we need to recruit this guy, but we also need to stop him. He's not likely to trust any of us, so be prepared to grab him and explain later. Once we're not looking at mass death, we can discuss him joining us. The lovely and talented Ms. Cabral managed to snag a gun from a Utopia courier who was delivering it to some Fedgov spooks. It's a dart gun that should make grabbing The Miracle a whole lot easier. Whoever wants to go get him let me know.

Directive File

TOP PRIORITY: FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION TO ALL AGENTS

From: Western Field Director Andrew J. Southwick

To: All agents

Re: Code Indigo Emergency Near Boulder City, Nevada

As our sources suspected, Gabriel Melchior (see attached datafile) is still alive. Current reports indicate that Triton Foundation doctors took him into voluntary medical custody approximately one year ago. He escaped 40 hours ago and is now inside the headquarters of the Church of the Immanent Escheaton, five kilometers outside Boulder City, Nevada. Utopia officials contacted the President about this problem an hour ago. They clearly believe this situation is extremely serious. While we have not been able to fully confirm the veracity of their reports, they claim that Melchior is dangerously insane and that his powers of biological manipulation have expanded to the point that his threats to loose a deadly plague should be taken every seriously. Their lethality estimate has a US minimum of 10 percent and a worldwide minimum of 5 percent, if the problem is not contained. The high-end figures are much worse. This situation is now our highest priority. All available agents are to be assigned to the problem.

Project Utopia is providing our agents with an experimental weapons which it claims will safely and rapidly render Gabriel unconscious. We have not had time to review this technology, but Utopia seems certain it will work. Use it at your own discretion. The Utopia coordinator is talking about capturing Melchior. Everyone on-site is instructed to disregard these instructions. Melchior is to be neutralized by any means necessary. Nuclear options are being seriously considered; that should tell you something about the severity of the situation. A solution which does not pit us directly against Utopia is preferable, but eliminating Melchior is currently our highest priority. Any degree of local collateral damage or diplomatic upset is acceptable as long as this objective is accomplished. General Alain Weston will be coordinating the operation. He has complete authority over the situation. Anyone with further knowledge of the situation should contact him immediately.

Begin Proteus communiqué double-encrypted with Navaho Daedalus 3

At 11:39 P.M. on December 12, Gabriel Melchior, a dangerously unstable nova with Alpha-range biomanipulation powers and Beta-range mind control powers escaped from the Algerian Branch of OG International, located seven kilometers outside Tamanrasset. Our preliminary reports indicate that his continuing mutation and his radically increasing power level allowed him to overcome the drugs used to render him tractable. Two operatives were killed during his escape, and a third operative is hospitalized in critical condition. From Algeria, he traveled by unknown means to Nigeria and boarded a flight to Puerto Rico. Once there, he flew to Las Vegas. Initial evidence indicates that he used his powers of mental control to facilitate his journey. Once in Las Vegas, he traveled by car to the headquarters of the Church of the Immanent Escheaton headquarters near Boulder City, Nevada. He left a trail of sick and dying individuals — people dying of exotic infections like kuru and cholera — all over Europe and North America. By back tracking the victim's courses, we were able to determine his destination. Not that it would have been much of a challenge anyway. Gabriel Melchior is the leader of this church and has undoubtedly found sanctuary among its members.

Initial communication with him indicated that he is lost in the depths of religious mania and that, if threatened, he plans to use his powers to unleash a deadly plague. Recent tests of his abilities indicate that he is quite capable of carrying out this threat. If he succeeds, one in six people now alive could be dead within a month. Agency psychologists predict that even if all opposition was withdrawn he still has a greater than 70 percent probability of releasing this plague. A mistake was made in keeping this individual alive, and the persons responsible are currently under investigation. It is imperative that Melchior be terminated as rapidly as possible. To this end, all agents will be assigned VTP dart guns containing darts designed to specifically affect the target. Read the attached file on VTPs for further information. VTPs are non-lethal, but once used, the subject should prove easy to terminate.

Given the extreme gravity of the problem, non-Proteus personnel inside Project Utopia became aware of his escape. Some of these personnel then contacted officials in the US government. The current cover story for Project Utopia and US government officials is that the subject escaped confinement from a Triton Foundation medical treatment facility.

Operatives are instructed to cooperate fully with all agents of the US government present at the situation. However, Gabriel must not be captured or questioned by any non-Proteus personnel. He has already demonstrated knowledge of Proteus operations that he gained through unknown means. We cannot afford to take the chance that he knows more. If possible, operatives should determine what information he has communicated to outsiders. Since information about Gabriel has reached unsecured channels, operatives should also expect possible Aberrant and Teragen interference.

E-mail From Project Utopia

From: Director William R. Reed
To: Team Tomorrow Americas
Subject: Emergency Threat in Nevada
Fellow Personnel:

You have been selected to help resolve the current situation near Boulder City, Nevada. Two days ago, Gabriel Melchior escaped from the Bahrain medical facility, where he had been undergoing treatment for dangerous levels of mental and physical mutation. Approximately a year ago, Mr. Melchior became aware of his increasing level of dangerous mutations and staged his disappearance from his church. At that point, he voluntarily turned himself over to Project Triton physicians for treatment. Triton Foundation physicians reported that he did not respond to treatment and that his condition continued to worsen. As serious mental deterioration set in, they attempted an array of experimental treatments. These treatments failed, and Mr. Melchior's mental condition declined even further. At this point, he became increasingly delusional. He had to be restrained and sedated for his own safety and for the safety of those around him. Two days ago, he escaped. Reports indicate that his enhanced physiology eventually managed to throw off the effects of the sedatives. Two Triton Foundation employees were killed during his escape, and the survivor's statements indicate that at the time of his escape Mr. Melchior was suffering from paranoid delusions that he had been taken bodily to Hell and tortured by demons. Unfortunately, he believes that that Project Utopia is responsible for his captivity. These delusions have also been incorporated into his existing religious beliefs, causing him to see Project Utopia and all of its allied organizations as being the direct agents of Satan.

After his escape Mr. Melchior fled to his church's headquarters near Boulder City, Nevada, where he has placed the members of the Church there under his mental control. At this time, Mr. Melchior is to be considered extremely dangerous. According to the Triton Foundation, his powers of biomanipulation and mental control are almost off the scale. Furthermore, he has threatened to unleash a plague, which he claims will kill all of the wicked peoples of the world. Triton Foundation physicians believe he is quite capable of unleashing a series of devastating plagues which would likely kill between 5 and 15 percent of the world's population. Currently, the entire area around the Nevada compound is under a complete news blackout to prevent mass panic. You are ordered to help maintain this media blackout until the situation is safely resolved.

Upon learning of his location and demands, Project Utopia leaders immediately contacted the government of the United States. Your team will be working with US government officials to help resolve this crisis. Obviously, eliminating the threat posed by Mr. Melchior is our first priority. Also, it is important to remember that more than 600 people are currently inside the Nevada compound. Protecting them and releasing them from his control is also a priority. If at all possible, Mr. Melchior must be recaptured and returned to the Triton Foundation for treatment. To that end, all of you will be issued VTP darts designed to affect Mr. Melchior's genetic profile. See the attached file for further information on VTPs. We are counting on you, and more importantly, the entire world is counting on you to resolve this situation safely.

Good luck and best wishes,
— William F. Reed

Special Bulletin

From Triton Foundation Special Bulletin, by Dr. Simon Chang, classified code Triple Alpha 12/14/09

The gravity of the current situation regarding the escape of Gabriel Melchior cannot be overestimated. His powers of biomanipulation are perhaps the most powerful on record. His abilities allow him to control and alter plants, animals, humans and even bacteria and viruses. This control occurs on an almost subconscious level. He can change living beings into literally any form he can imagine, despite his complete lack of biological or medical training. Our most recent battery of psychological tests indicates that he is a monomaniacal paranoid with delusions of grandeur and a strong messiah complex. An interview with the single survivor of his escape indicates that he is preparing to cleanse the world of evil by releasing a series of deadly plagues. This threat is not a bluff. He is quite capable of creating and releasing such plagues simply by altering the composition of ordinary household microbes and then dispersing them through the air.

My team has been studying methods of neutralizing Gabriel Melchior. In our opinion as long as he is not aware of the nature of the attack, VTP darts should prove quite effective. The viruses in VTPs are created using the target's own DNA, and Melchior has been proven to have difficulty using his more elaborate powers against nova-derived genetics. Also, except for his continuous production of low-level viruses, Melchior's abilities always require a conscious decision and a defined target. As long as he is not given time to focus on the dart, he should not be able to resist its effects.

Other options prove more problematic. A massive attack using powers which cause large-scale tissue destruction or neural disruption should work, but the effects would have to incapacitate him within 10 seconds. Gabriel is capable of rapidly repairing almost any level of physical damage which does not instantly kill him. A direct physical attack should only be attempted if use of VTPs proves impossible.

While use of the nuclear option has been proposed, I do not consider it viable. While a powerful fission or fusion device would clearly destroy him and everyone else within several kilometers, use of such devices is impractical given the close proximity to Las Vegas. The fallout and radiation would cause between one and three percent mortality within the city limits. Only a small yield, low fallout weapon such as a neutron bomb would prove safe. Unfortunately, I cannot guarantee that Melchior cannot temporarily resist the effects of such a weapon. While he would certainly die if he were within 100 meters of a neutron bomb blast, there is a 75 percent chance that he could remain alive and conscious for at least 15 seconds. During this time he could easily release his plagues, some of which could potentially prove radiation resistant enough to survive. However, if the plagues are released, use of a neutron bomb within one minute of release has an 80 percent chance of reducing the severity of the plagues by eliminating all radiation sensitive strains. Essentially, using nukes is better than nothing, but they should only be used as an option of last resort.

The use of nova weather control to contain the dispersed pathogens has also been proposed. Given the extreme virulence of the plagues involved and the difficulty of completely containing the numerous bacteria and viruses, the risk of at least some of the pathogens escaping is greater than 50 percent. While a nova weather controller like Splash should be available if needed, this method should also only be used as a last resort. In short, the only way to ensure that the plagues are not released is to prevent Mr. Melchior from releasing them.

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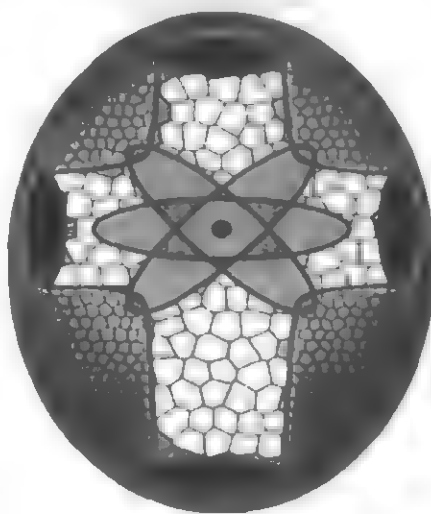
the news

December 14, 2009

Boulder City, Nevada: Federal Government officials have surrounded the headquarters of the Church of the Immanent Escheaton.

Acting on a tip from an anonymous source, government officials believe that members of the church are storing illegal weapons and restricted technologies in their Nevada compound. Late last night, N! learned that church leaders refused to allow officials of the ATF to inspect the compound for weapons and technologies violations and fired upon ATF inspectors who attempted to force their way inside. As our readers may remember, Gabriel Melchior, also known as The Miracle, headed the CIE until March of 2008 when he vanished from Houston, Texas, during one of his church's highly publicized revival meetings. Project Utopia representatives who surveyed the sight after his disappearance noted that unusual energy readings were present at his last known location.

Government officials have refused to comment on whether or not this investigation is linked in any fashion with Gabriel's disappearance last year and have ordered all journalists and other non-essential personnel to evacuate the area, since the Church is suspected of housing powerful chemical weapons. No motive has been given for the church's possession of such weapons, and church members from the CIE's other branches declined to be interviewed by N!.



[Click Here](#)

for further information on the CIE

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N! Datafile: The Church of the Immanent Escheaton

Chrystian Kalpa founded the CIE in 1998, several weeks after N-Day. After seeing a nova erupt during an automobile crash, Mr. Kalpa says he was overcome by a vision of the true meaning of that year's exceptional events. According to him, God, whom he referred to as the Quantum Unity, was granting certain humans miraculous powers to prepare the world for the Second Coming and the ultimate battle between good and evil. While this battle was still years or possibly decades away, God gave some people nova powers to help everyone realize that time was growing short and to help humanity prepare for the battle. In CIE doctrine, when the last days actually arrive, all people will be granted nova powers. During this time, everyone will choose to serve either good or evil, and the sides will fight a final battle to determine the spiritual fate of humanity.

Using the fortune he had previously accumulated as CEO of Yaeger Pharmaceuticals, Mr. Kalpa built the church's headquarters outside of Boulder City, Nevada and began preaching by radio, TV and eventually OpNet. In the first months of 1999, the church gained more than 10,000 members. However, as humanity adjusted to the presence of novas and the predicted millennial disasters of 2000 and 2001 failed to arrive, church attendance dwindled.

In 2004, Mr. Kalpa mysteriously disappeared, and the CIE was on the verge of collapse. However, the church was saved when parishioner Gabriel Melchior's car went off the road on his way from Boulder City to the small town of Tonapah, Nevada. Trapped in the desert with no food or water in the middle of summer, Gabriel's latent nova powers erupted. His new powers allowed him to heal his injuries and to grow plants, which provided him with both shade and water. When a passing trucker found him, Gabriel immediately traveled back to the church headquarters and proclaimed himself the church's new prophet. Within six months, he treated the world to the first of his dramatic public revivals. Mr. Melchior combined spectacular feats of healing with displays of other nova powers including large-scale, nearly instantaneous creations of lush temperate jungles that he claimed resemble the coming kingdom of Heaven. Building upon the beliefs of Mr. Kalpa, Mr. Melchior, dubbed The Miracle by the local media, proclaimed that the forces of good and evil were already aligning themselves among us and that the final battle would occur in less than a decade. His preaching emphasized the responsibility of every person to choose their allegiance and to live their life as if the last days would arrive tomorrow. Drawn by his inhuman charisma and his elaborate displays of vast nova powers, church membership grew to more than 25,000.

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[Click here for recent history of the CIE](#)

Introduction

Using the Setting Material

Before running this scenario, the Storyteller should carefully read all of the setting material. This material is divided into multiple sections. Each piece is written from the perspective of a different organization, and each displays a different viewpoint on the same situation. Players should only be allowed to read specific portions of the setting material.

All players should be shown the information from their characters' organization, since their characters will have actually received these files and messages. In addition, all characters will have access to the Triton Foundation Special Bulletin on page 87, since this file was sent to or stolen by all of the organizations which are involved. If any characters check the news they should also be shown the N! bulletin and the N! datafile on pages 88-89. The remainder of the setting material should not be shown to the players.

Overview

In 2004, Gabriel Melchior erupted and became the nova known in media circles as "The Miracle." A devoted believer of a small sect of Christian fundamentalism known as the Church of the Immanent Escheaton, Gabriel believed his powers to be a divine blessing and was determined to use them to lead other to God's light. Gabriel became the leader of his church and, over the course of the next four years, helped increase membership from 2,000 to over 25,000. During this time, he extensively pushed his powers in a series of ever-more impressive displays during televised revival meetings. As a result of these stresses on his powers, Gabriel substantially increased both his Quantum and his Taint. By 2008, he had gained a Taint of 7 and a Quantum of 6. It was clear to observers in Project Proteus both that Gabriel was beginning to increase in power exponentially and that his sanity was rapidly decaying. Fearing the damage that he could do and worrying that he would become even more difficult to capture and contain if his power increased further, Proteus decided to act.

On Easter 2008, in the midst of the largest demonstration of his God-given powers yet, Proteus operative Argent produced a harmless, but extremely impressive display of pyrotechnics and warped Gabriel into the Triton Foundation's nova research facility in Bahrain. The CIE proclaimed that Gabriel had been bodily taken to Heaven, and the media assumed he had self-destructed in an attempt to exceed even his vast powers. Meanwhile, in Bahrain, Triton researchers studied Gabriel extensively, while keeping him sedated using a combination of nova powers and experimental drugs.

It quickly became clear that Gabriel was hopelessly insane and that he was continuing to increase in power. Several Project Proteus supervisors recommended that he was literally too dangerous to live and that he be euthanized immediately. However, Triton Foundation physicians were anxious to study someone suffering from such a high degree of Taint. Also, Gabriel's primary power is Biomanipulation, and his command of it was greater than that possessed by almost any other known nova, so some in Project Proteus wished to harness his vast power.

After holding Gabriel for three months, both Triton and Proteus officials agreed that, while he was exceedingly dangerous, he could also be extremely useful. Because Project Utopia's Operation Genesis was falling badly behind schedule, the heads of the Bahrain facility decided to unofficially loan Gabriel to this project. Pumped full of mind-altering drugs and mentally controlled by Allison "Psyche" Pfaltzgraff, a powerful T2M nova who secretly works for Project Proteus, Gabriel was used as a tool to reclaim vast portions of the Sahara when Antaeus was busy or absent. Gabriel was kept completely isolated from the other novas involved in this effort. When possible, he and Psyche worked alone, except for a few other Proteus agents stationed nearby. The necessity of his powers meant that he was often forced to use them during his medically mandated rest-periods. Instead of recovering from his exertions, he was frequently required to produce large quantities of specially designed bacteria that were then aerially dispersed over the target areas by novas.

As a result of overwork and the stresses of constant mental control, both Gabriel's Taint and his powers continued to grow. In early December of 2009, after a particularly exhausting week, Gabriel displayed his most recent mutation. Becoming a factory for a wide variety of deadly bacteria, viruses and prions forced Gabriel to increase in both Quantum and Taint. As a result of these increases, Gabriel managed to throw off Psyche's control in a vast display of power that killed two of her assistants and left Psyche extremely ill. Now, insane, full of rage at his captivity and convinced that the apocalypse is nigh, Gabriel used his powers to coerce various people into taking him to his church's headquarters, located outside of Boulder City, Nevada.

He arrived less than two days ago and is currently planning for the coming battle between Heaven and Hell. Gabriel has decided, perhaps understandably, that Project Utopia and their associates are actually the army of Satan and the heralds of the Antichrist. Gabriel has vivid memories of the torments he underwent at the hands of Psyche and his other Proteus handlers. Also, unknown to them, during his captivity Gabriel developed low-level ESP. Using this power in a largely subconscious fashion, Gabriel received numerous "visions" of Proteus' other captives. He also used this power to observe several highly sensitive, top-secret Proteus and Triton Foun-



dation meetings where he “overheard” a great deal of highly secret information.

Since his arrival in the CIE compound, he has been preaching his dark message to the other members of his sect. Using their heavily encrypted OpNet message boards, the CIE managed to summon more than 600 of their members to this compound. Within a few hours of his arrival, Project Utopia located Gabriel and surrounded the compound. Now, aided by agents of the US government, they are attempting to find some way to safely deal with Gabriel. Currently, the compound is in a state of siege, and Gabriel is preaching that the final battle is at hand.

Gabriel fears being taken captive again and is determined to right the injustices performed by the forces of Satan. Unfortunately, his solution is to use his formidable powers to loose deadly plagues that he believes will slay the unworthy and free the world from all sinners. If left to his own devices, Gabriel would attempt to speak with various world leaders and warn them of the danger before them. He has prepared various speeches, and only jamming by Proteus agents surrounding the compound has prevented these messages from reaching the OpNet.

Now that he has been surrounded, Gabriel has no intention of surrendering or of allowing any of his followers to fall into the hands of the various forces arrayed against him. If he is ever certain that the capture of the compound is imminent, he will release the plagues.

For now, he remains convinced that he can talk to at least some of those who are besieging the compound and persuade them to renounce their ties to evil and aid him in his fight. If possible, he hopes to win free of the compound and personally proclaim his message to the masses before releasing his plagues.

Regardless of the characters’ affiliation or motivations, their primary goal should be to prevent Gabriel from releasing plagues that will kill between 100 million and one billion people. Killing or capturing him are both options. Alternately, characters that represent groups opposed to Project Utopia can possibly convince Gabriel to seek sanctuary with them. After listening to him talk, the characters will also become aware of the fact that amidst his religious diatribes Gabriel possesses a surprising amount of information about his captivity and about other Project Proteus activities he monitored, including one conversation about Slider’s murder. Currently, there are numerous groups who all want Gabriel — some to silence him and others to use him or to attempt to help him. The characters will need to work out a plan to grab Gabriel, while also preventing anyone from killing or capturing him first.

The Setting

Gabriel’s compound is a large modern structure located 30 kilometers from Las Vegas and 8 kilometers outside of the town of Boulder City, Nevada. The com-

pound is located in the middle of a barren desert of brilliant white sand. Even in early May, temperatures often rise above 35 degrees centigrade during the day and fall to around 5 degrees during the night. Located on flat ground only two kilometers from the large rocky expanse which leads up to the mountains around Boulder Dam, the compound itself is stark white and built of advanced, highly insulating composites, faced with high quality white marble. It consists of a series of four long, narrow wings arranged in a cross pattern. These wings are all arranged around the large, central geodesic dome where the compound's chapel is located. The three short arms of the cross are each 100 meters long, 20 meters wide and 3 meters tall, the long arm of the cross is 300 meters long, 20 meters wide and 3 meters tall. The central dome is 35 meters in diameter and 20 meters high. The entire structure is built on a single story and is well built and attractive, if rather Spartan. The central chapel takes up the entire central dome. It has large, stained-glass windows and an extremely high ceiling decorated with elaborate, abstract marble carvings meant to inspire awe and devotion in the viewers.

Several acres of nearby solar cells supply power to the compound, which is fully climate controlled. The compound also uses ground water drawn up by electric pumps and, with the exception of food, is fully self-sufficient. Since the compound has enough food available to feed everyone inside for the next two weeks, they are unlikely to run out of supplies before the current crisis is over. The inside of the compound consists of a series of clean straight corridors, numerous small single rooms where the residents can pray and meditate in private and a number of large dining halls and assembly rooms. Currently 650 of the church's most devoted followers live here.

Shortly after Gabriel escaped, he made a single phone call to Mary Catanzaro, his most trusted aid. In the two days before his arrival, she secretly informed numerous other members of the church, and many of them traveled to the compound. Currently, the compound, which was only designed to hold around 500 people, is somewhat overcrowded. Also, the entire compound is currently alive with a host of diseases, including TB, influenza and measles, that Gabriel's mutated body constantly produces. However, during the various worship services Gabriel leads, he unconsciously cleanses his flock of all diseases and injuries, providing further proof that his plagues will not harm the righteous. His worship services are held at 6:00 A.M., 2:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M.. Everyone in the compound is expected to attend at least two services a day. Gabriel also uses these occasions to help prepare his flock for the coming apocalypse. As a result of their frequent contact with Gabriel's preaching, his powers of mental control have completely enthralled the entire congregation.

Publicity

While there are few secrets on the early 21st century OpNet, Project Utopia and the US government have so far managed to keep the true magnitude of the situation in Nevada secret. US government sources have stated that the cults' Nevada compound contains illegal weapons, including a large quantity of high explosives and other weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore, the report claims that there is evidence of child abuse in the compound. According to this report, US government and Project Utopia representatives are currently negotiating for the release of the children and for permission to inspect the compound for illegal weapons. A few rumors of chemical weapons have served to keep civilians from attempting to approach the compound, while a heavily armed blockade has so far kept reporters at bay. While several watchdog organizations believe that the situation in Nevada is more serious than the government admits, no one in the media or the general public has any idea of the true magnitude of the problem. Even Teragen and Aberrant agents on-site are reluctant to release this information, since the resultant panic could spread around the world in a matter of hours and could easily result in a possible surge of violence against

If any of the characters release information about the actual situation in Nevada, hundreds will die in mass panics as millions attempt to flee Nevada. In addition, various nations, including China and Russia, will demand that the US government immediately use nuclear weapons to destroy the Nevada compound. The situation will be resolved before any of these nations actually drops a nuclear weapon on US soil. However, the resulting panics, combined with the dramatically increased international tensions, will cause any members of Project Utopia or the Directive who release this information to be sanctioned and demoted (lose at least two dots in status). Any members of Project Proteus who accidentally or purposefully releases information about this situation will be killed, unless they flee, in which case they will be hunted by their own organization.

Gabriel's Opposition

While numerous individuals, representing a variety of factions are involved in the siege on the compound, there are two groups which predominate, the United States government and Project Utopia. Both organizations are terrified of the mass death that Gabriel could initiate. Current estimates by both sides predict that if Gabriel actually releases his plagues approximately 10-30 percent of the population of the United States and Mexico would probably die before the diseases are contained. If the diseases prove even worse than initial predictions indicate, they could spread farther, and the death toll could potentially go as high as one billion worldwide.

To avoid this tragedy, Project Utopia and the US government are working together to contain the situation and to render Gabriel harmless.

Within two hours of Gabriel's arrival, Project Utopia had surrounded the compound. Making a snap decision which some Utopian agents are beginning to regret, Project Coordinator Lauren Ahmir also informed the President of the United States of the true nature of the problem. Three hours later, a mixed team of Special Forces soldiers and FBI negotiators had joined the Project Utopia operatives. While the Project Utopia and US government operatives distrust each other, they are also quite aware of the necessity of working together to prevent a vast tragedy. Both groups also maintain that their primary goal is to find a peaceful solution to the problem. However, with Gabriel preaching imminent apocalypse, it is clear that drastic measures may be called for.

Running the Adventure

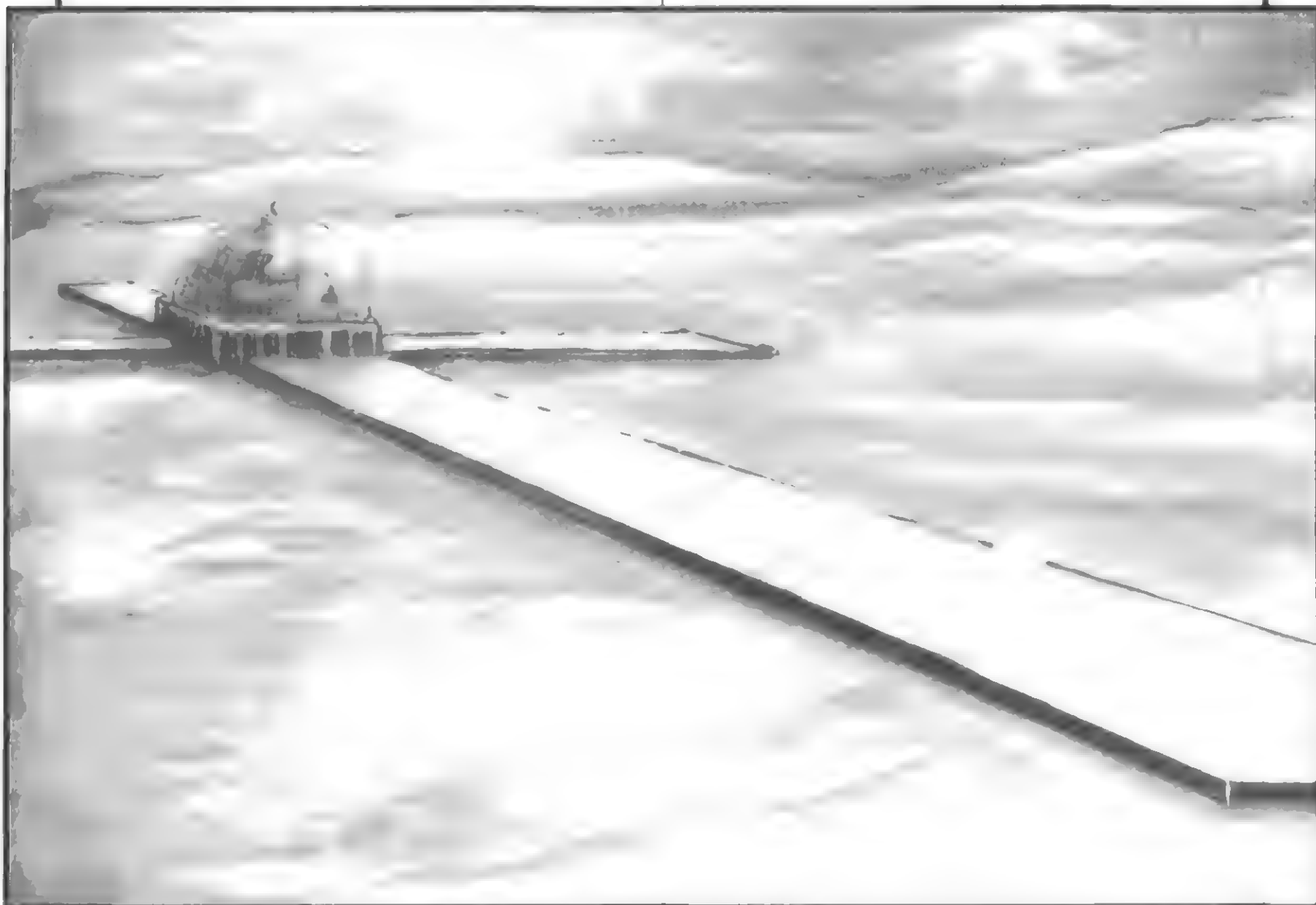
The central focus of the scenario is Gabriel Melchior. Regardless of their allegiance, to succeed, the characters should be encouraged to find out what he knows about Project Proteus and then render him harmless, either through capturing him, killing him or (temporarily) recruiting him. The interaction between the characters and Gabriel or his aid Mary Catanzaro should

be the heart of the scenario. Whether the characters talk with Gabriel or Mary at length or merely long enough for the characters to develop a plan to invade the compound, most of the scenario should involve dealing with Gabriel. The scenario is effectively over once he has been killed or captured.

However, the characters are not the only people working to save the world from Gabriel. The encampment surrounding the compound is full of a wide variety of rival organizations, each with their own (often conflicting) agendas. The Storyteller must make it clear that everyone there is interested primarily in stopping Gabriel from releasing plagues that may slay up to a billion people. However, the conflicts and maneuvering among the various groups should form an important sidelight to the scenario. In addition, regardless of the plans of the various other groups, the characters must be at the center of any effort to capture or kill Gabriel.

Behind the Scenes Motivations and Setup

The following section discusses the motivations and structures of the various groups who are present. Storytellers should remember that, with the exception of the Directive, which seriously distrusts all novas, the characters are in charge of whichever team they belong to. While the characters are still answerable to their



superiors, this setup allows the characters a great deal of power and authority. Given the gravity of the situation, characters are allowed to call upon the full range of resources available to their organization. Refer to the transcripts from the various factions to get a sense of each organizations' attitude regarding the current problem.

The Insiders

The groups who are openly surrounding the compound are Project Utopia and the US government. In addition, some of the Project Utopia Personnel secretly work for Project Proteus, and some of the FBI personnel really work for the Directive. However, both the Directive and Project Proteus are represented only by a few individuals. If the characters belong to Project Proteus, they are the only members on site. In the case of the Directive, the characters are the only nova Directive agents present.

Project Utopia

The members of Project Utopia are completely unaware of the torments Gabriel has been subjected to. Instead, the members of Project Proteus have created a plausible story to cover existing events. Unfortunately, the speed with which the situation has unfolded has left this cover story with a few holes that clever novas may be able to see through.

Project Utopia members have been informed that after Gabriel disappeared a year ago he voluntarily checked himself into a Triton Foundation medical facility. At that time, he received therapy for his growing instability. Unfortunately, ordinary treatments failed, and he became dangerously insane after undergoing an experimental treatment to reduce his Taint. After escaping from the Triton medical facility, he vanished and reappeared at his church's Nevada compound a few days later, proclaiming the coming of the End Times.

The Project Utopia personnel on-site have full access to Gabriel's medical and psychological records. They have all been made fully aware of both the depths of his insanity and the full magnitude of his powers. All Project Utopia agents in Nevada have also been informed that the information on Gabriel must be kept under wraps to prevent widespread panic and that they are to cooperate fully with US government officials.

If the characters are not playing Project Utopia personnel, then the Storyteller should assume that high-level Project Proteus officials selected a team of T2M novas who actually work for Project Proteus. The baseline Project Utopia personnel outside of the compound have no idea of the truth about Gabriel's captivity and wish to capture him and bring him back to be treated. However, the novas who will actually attempt to capture Gabriel are all Project Proteus operatives who actually have order to kill him as soon as possible. See the section on Project Proteus below for further information.

If the Characters Belong to Project Utopia

If the characters are working for Project Utopia, then they are almost certainly publicly known novas who are possibly even members of Team Tomorrow. Characters in this position will have great freedom of action. Unless they seem to be making serious mistakes, they will be effectively in charge of Project Utopia's handling of this situation. Unfortunately, this also means that they are the people who must deal directly with both Gabriel and the representatives of the US government who are on-site. As Team Tomorrow members, they may end up heroes if they safely deal with Gabriel, and they will certainly receive a full share of the blame if they fail in any way.

The head of the Project Utopia Diplomacy Corps team dealing with Gabriel is Lauren Ahmir, a highly intelligent and charismatic baseline who worked in Scotland Yard as a hostage negotiator before she joined Project Utopia. She will keep Gabriel talking while the rest of the team devises a plan to capture or otherwise neutralize him. Ms. Ahmir is puzzled by some of Gabriel's ravings but will not question Gabriel about specific points unless the characters suggest it. Her goal is simply to keep Gabriel busy until he can be captured. She will encourage any characters who seem so inclined to speak to Gabriel as fellow novas. If any of the characters seem at all likely to be an effective negotiator, then replace Lauren Ahmir with this character. Otherwise, Ms. Ahmir is the only senior Project Utopia official present.

The characters have orders to capture Gabriel alive if at all possible. To facilitate this they have been issued dart guns loaded with VTPs (see VTPs on page 115 for further information). However, as long as civilian casualties are minimized, capturing or killing Gabriel are both considered viable options.

If the characters are members of Project Utopia, then for simplicity's sake, there are no Project Proteus novas on-site. Instead, Project Proteus is content to allow Project Utopia to capture Gabriel. Proteus agents will then arrive to take possession of Gabriel shortly after he has been rendered unconscious. See The Project Proteus Hit Squad on page 102 for further information on this contingency.

Project Proteus

Project Proteus is the only organization that is aware of the full truth of the situation. Its agents know what was done to Gabriel, they know the actual extent of his powers, and they suspect that he may have highly sensitive information about Project Proteus' activities. As a result of this knowledge and the danger Gabriel poses to all of humanity, their instructions are quite clear. They are to kill Gabriel Melchior by any means necessary, after first discovering how much sensitive information he has revealed. If the characters are not members of Project Proteus, then no Project Proteus novas will appear until after Gabriel has been captured. Instead,

Project Proteus will allow others to kill or capture Gabriel and will then take possession of him. Remember that even the existence of Proteus is an exceedingly well-kept secret. Members of Project Proteus will never identify themselves as such. If necessary, they may identify themselves as members of a small Special Forces squad sponsored by Project Utopia.

If the Characters Belong to Project Proteus

If the characters are members of Project Proteus, they are also representatives of Project Utopia. Since even Project Utopia does not have an unlimited number of novas, the characters will likely be the only novas associated with either Project Proteus or Project Utopia who are present. While the characters must still answer to their Project Proteus superiors, they will be the top ranking Project Utopia members present. The characters will have all of the rights and responsibilities that being prominent Project Utopia novas brings with it. See the Project Utopia section above for information about the characters' cover identities. However, the characters' agenda will be considerably different from that of the actual Project Utopia members. In addition to killing Gabriel, the Proteus operatives present have also been instructed to make certain that any compromising information possessed by Gabriel is kept away from Project Utopia, the US government and the media. Ascertaining the true extent of Gabriel's knowledge and who else he has relayed his evidence to is an important but ultimately secondary objective.

Storytellers might even decide that one or more of the characters were involved with either Gabriel's initial capture or with his captivity. However, none of the characters will be anyone Gabriel recognizes as an enemy. Project

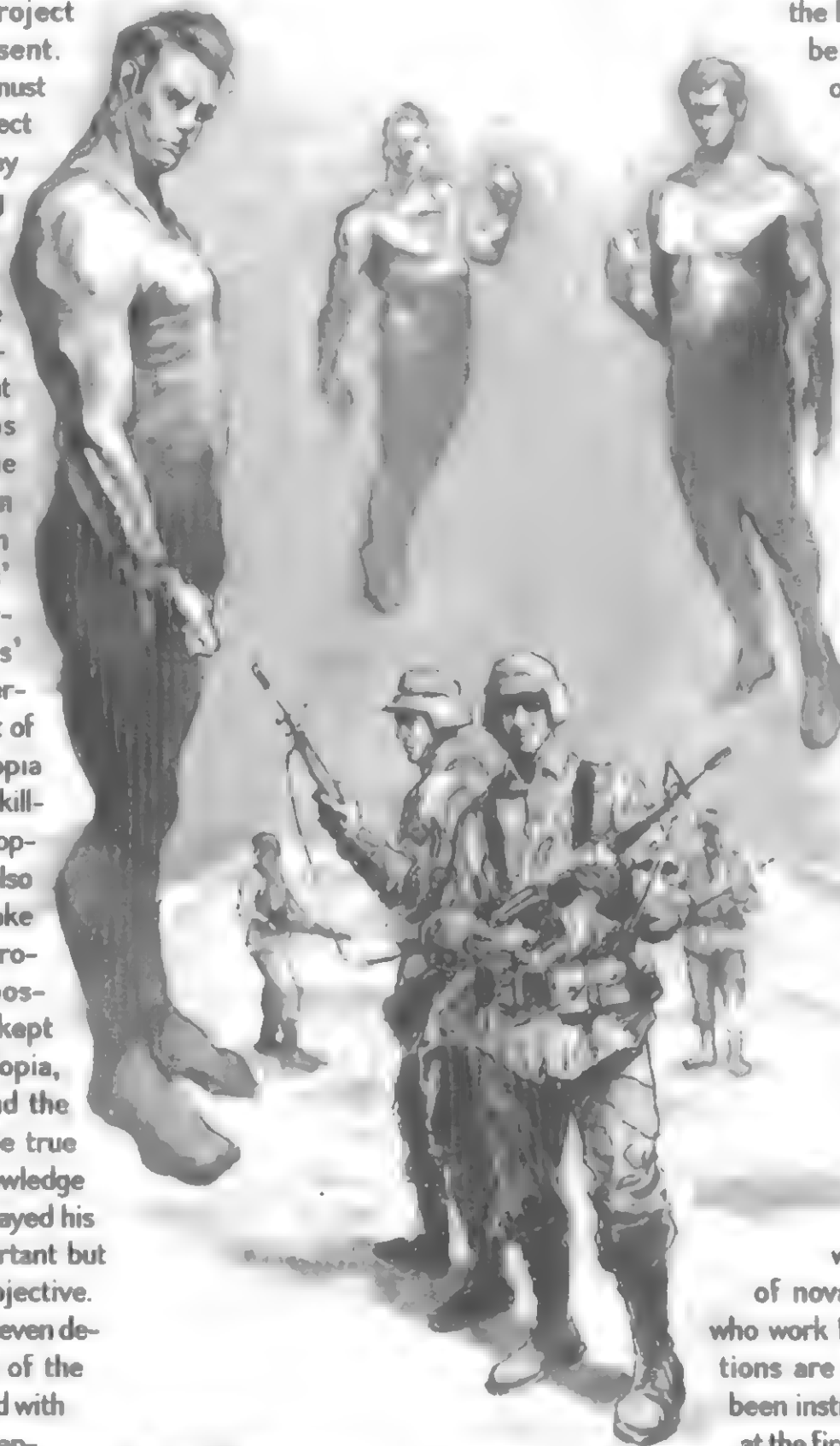
Proteus is unwilling to send someone whose presence might send Gabriel into a homicidal rage.

The Directive

The FBI crisis team and their special squad of novas trained in law enforcement are actually all Directive agents who have been provided with an appropriate cover story. The Directive knows only what Project Utopia has told the US government, but its agents suspect that more is going on. They have two primary objectives: to neutralize Gabriel Melchior and to find out more about how the situation occurred and what Project Utopia may be hiding. If the characters are not

members of the Directive, then the Directive will merely be observers for most of the scenario. Directive agents will listen in on all conversations between Project Utopia negotiators and Gabriel. The head of the operation, General Alain Weston, who is also the head of the US government task force, will request periodic updates from Project Utopia personnel. He is a brusque and forceful man who will constantly urge that the situation be dealt with as rapidly as possible.

General Alain Weston is a mildly paranoid and highly experienced baseline who is none too fond of novas, including novas who work for him. His instructions are very clear. He has been instructed to kill Gabriel at the first opportunity. While obtaining secret information about Project Utopia is a useful goal, it is far outweighed by the necessity of killing Gabriel as rapidly as



possible. If Project Utopia efforts seem to be taking too long, his current plan involves sneaking a neutron bomb into the compound.

Simply dropping a bomb on the compound would be highly obvious and would produce an extremely negative public reaction, especially since the bomb would also kill both the 500 cultists and the 150 children they have with them. However, the Directive has plans to blame the mysterious nuclear explosion inside the compound on illegal weapons Gabriel's followers had stolen. Despite seeing the report by the Triton Foundation, General Weston is convinced that even an "aberrant monster" like Gabriel will be instantly destroyed in a nuclear blast.

If the Characters Belong to the Directive

If Directive agents, the characters were sent in both because they are highly competent and because opponents of General Weston's quick and dirty approach to the situation wished to have people on-site. The characters have been instructed to balance the immediate need to neutralize Gabriel with the necessity to find out how the situation occurred, so that similar problems can be prevented in the future. Since some division heads within the Directive would like Gabriel taken alive, the characters have been issued VTP dart guns which were given to the US government by Project Utopia at the beginning of this crisis. See VTPs on page 115 for further information.

If the characters follow order and open their own communications with Gabriel, it will become apparent fairly quickly that he is an excellent, if highly erratic, source of knowledge about Project Utopia's covert programs. It will also be clear that he may even have important data about a shadowy organization known as Project Proteus. To characters that are working for the Directive, obtaining this information is almost as important as eliminating the threat posed by Gabriel. As long as the characters are not delaying any attack on Gabriel, General Weston will also give any characters who ask permission to communicate directly with Gabriel. Since the operation takes place on US soil, General Weston can legally request that Dr. Ahmir, the Project Utopia negotiator, introduce the characters and allow them to speak with Gabriel.

The Outsiders

If the characters belong to either the Aberrants or the Teragen, then their position is much more tenuous. In either case, the characters are not welcome in this area. Given the magnitude of the crisis, if their presence is discovered, they would probably be arrested and possibly killed outright. Members of Project Utopia, Project Proteus and the Directive are all in a state of near panic and are likely to consider any intrusion by Aberrant or Teragen forces as an attack. In practice, there are only two methods that outsiders could enter the scene. Either one of the characters could use her powers to bring the characters to the site secretly, perhaps using Warp

or Invisibility, or the characters can be masquerading as people with a legitimate right to be there. The second option is generally to be preferred unless the characters are prepared to enter the compound by warping or other paranormal means and then immediately persuade Gabriel that they are allies. To simplify things, the characters will be the only on-site members of whichever of these two groups they belong to.

The Teragen

The Teragen knows very little of what is going on. Most of their information about this affair comes in the form of an e-mail message from a high-ranking Project Utopia official to the US President that was intercepted by Synapse, the Teragen Pantheon's primary cyberkinetic. Currently, the Terats know Gabriel is dangerous, supposedly quite mad and that both Project Utopia and the US government want him dead or in custody. On the theory that their enemy's enemy is their friend, they have sent a team to attempt to recruit or, if necessary, capture Gabriel. Since several prominent members of the Teragen are considered mad by the general public, the characters' base assumption going in should be that while Gabriel is obviously a religious fanatic, claims of his criminal insanity are most likely just Project Utopia propaganda.

If the characters are not members of the Teragen, then the Teragen "liberation team" will consist of three members: Blackout, Leo and Heavy. See pp. 111-112 for details. Also, read *The Teragen Intervenes* on page 102 for further information on their activities. Other than the activities described there, Terats will have little roll in this drama.

If the Characters Work for the Teragen

If the characters' Teragen "liberation team" can easily pose as minor aids to the Project Utopia staff, Synapse has provided them all with detailed and complete backgrounds. In all cases Terats will be posing as baselines (Project Utopia keeps careful track of all of its novas). To use this option, none of the party can possess any obvious physical aberrations that cannot be concealed by Dormancy. Once on-site, the characters will also need to communicate with Gabriel. If none of the characters can communicate with him directly, then the Teragen has supplied them with descrambling communications gear, which will also allow them to listen in on other communications with Gabriel.

If the characters are unable to pose as baselines, then a slightly different setup must be used. The characters will have to use their powers to hide from the various other groups and spy upon them. In such a case, the Storyteller must provide the characters with a method of intercepting communications between the others groups and Gabriel's compound and a method of communicating with the compound directly. Telepathy is the most obvious option, but Cyberkinesis, Teleport or even ESP all provide possible solutions. If the characters' powers are not adequate to allow them to safely observe the

other groups and to communicate directly with Gabriel, then the Teragen should provide them with advanced blacktech surveillance and communications gear.

Some players may assume that the Teragen will only be concerned with recruiting Gabriel and obtaining the secrets he knows about Project Utopia. However, even the most ruthless and radically post-humanist members of the Teragen have no desire to see more than one sixth of the world's population die, since they are afraid of the riots and likely backlash against all novas such an event would cause. Some members of the Teragen wish to rule humanity, others merely to ignore it, but very few of them wish to callously destroy it, especially not in a manner which will almost certainly result in a vast public outcry again all novas by the survivors.

The Aberrants

The Aberrants have numerous members inside Project Utopia. The Aberrants know everything which Project Utopia knows about the situation, as well as having full access to the Triton Foundation reports on Gabriel's medical condition and one top secret Triton report which discussed how Gabriel was officially under the jurisdiction of Project Proteus. For the Aberrants, not only is Gabriel a threat to humanity, he is also living proof of the corruption within Project Utopia. If the characters are not playing Aberrants, then the Aberrants will not have any direct roll in the scenario. The Storyteller should assume that the Aberrants were unable to place anyone inside the Project Utopia team. If desired, there can be instead an Aberrant member in the Teragen "liberation team" (see above). Otherwise, simply assume that the Aberrants are listening in on transmissions to and from the compound and that they will attempt to take Gabriel away from the group who captures him.

The vast majority of the Aberrants wish to avoid the negative backlash of making their information on corruption inside Project Utopia public. However, the Aberrants have great plans for if and when they manage to rescue Gabriel or, at least, learn more about his captivity by Project Proteus. The fact that Project Utopia's covert activities resulted in a threat which could kill almost a billion people has persuaded many members that once they have Gabriel, it will be time to publicly denounce Project Utopia.

If the Characters Are Playing Aberrants

While Aberrant agents here can have many positions, they are most likely publicly known novas who appear to be working for Project Utopia. This is the most likely and, in many ways, the most desirable option for characters who are playing Aberrants. The characters could even be members of Team Tomorrow who are seeking to reform Project Utopia from within. As novas belonging to Project Utopia, they will be effectively in charge of the Project Utopia task force. See "If the Characters Belong to Project Utopia" on page 94 for further details.

If one or two of the characters wish to be independent Aberrants with no ties to Project Utopia, then they could be hiding nearby and secretly communicating with the rest of the group. Alternately, they could be using Dormancy to masquerade as US government or Project Utopia baseline operatives. If the entire party is either unsuited or unwilling to be Project Utopia novas, then they could all be hiding or disguised as baselines. However, placing the characters in this position will significantly limit their freedom of action. Instead of working with the organizations who are all on-site, the characters must hide from the Directive and Project Utopia personnel who are present and secretly negotiate with Gabriel. While this approach actually has a high chance of success, it is also quite risky. See If the Characters Work for the Teragen on page 96 for further details on this approach.

Other Options for Outsiders

This adventure is structured so that the characters' first contact with Gabriel occurs once he has arrived at his Nevada compound. Large organizations like the Project Proteus, Project Utopia and the Directive would have a much less difficult time taking Gabriel into custody if they encountered him while he was fleeing from Africa to Nevada. However, characters playing Teragen members or Aberrants who met Gabriel while he was traveling to the Nevada compound could have a very different sort of challenge. Storytellers should be aware that this option may only require a single session to run and is likely to be much more direct and combat-heavy than the average scenario based around the compound. The information provided for this option is necessarily rather brief, and Storytellers will need to expand somewhat upon these details.

The set-up for running this alternative is simple. One of the characters' contacts or allies has discovered the fact the Gabriel is alive and missing by capturing a courier carrying two VTP dart guns (see page 115) and a sealed packet of information about The Miracle's escape. Several hours later, this same contact uncovered a probable location for Gabriel.

After changing planes several times to throw off pursuit, Gabriel is in a tiny airport in Bayamón, Puerto Rico. From here, he plans to fly to Las Vegas and then coerce a tourist to drive him to his church's compound. His flight leaves in 12 hours, and he is currently resting in a hot, dingy and extremely run-down hotel a kilometer from the airport. The area around the hotel is largely composed of tin-roofed shacks and small stands selling bootleg videos, cheap food and over-priced souvenirs. Having been on the run for five days, Gabriel is both tired and exceptionally paranoid. He has already had one narrow escape in Nigeria and is ready at any moment for the forces of Satan to set upon him again. Currently, he is sitting in his hotel room watching the door. He will not sleep until he reaches safety.

Not only must the characters convince or coerce Gabriel into accompanying them, they must also avoid the Proteus and Utopia agents who are also pursuing him. Gabriel is traveling by normal means, but he is using the full extent of his Mega-Attributes to coerce numerous people into aiding him. If the characters are not either remarkably clever or in some fashion resistant to his powers, he will simply force them to aid him. If the characters manage to avoid being affected by Gabriel's powers, then they can either negotiate with him or attempt to capture him. See Taking Out Gabriel page 103 for information on how to abduct him.

Gabriel is extremely powerful. Even using VTP darts, capturing him will not be easy. If the characters instead attempt to talk to him, they will find him resistant to the idea of accompanying them anywhere but his Nevada compound. However, while he is quite insane, he is not stupid. If the characters mention the fact that their ability to locate him implies that Project Utopia and Proteus agents are likely not far behind, he may take them up on their offer of sanctuary. He will only do this if the characters appear sympathetic to his hatred of Project Utopia and if they are willing to discuss the entire matter in Fundamentalist Christian terms. If the characters appear uncomfortable with or ignorant of the details of Christianity, then Gabriel will consider them to be godless heathens and will refuse to work with them.

Shortly after the characters either manage to subdue Gabriel or convince him to accompany them, the Project Proteus strike team will show up. Use Blackout, Heavy and Leo, described on pp. 111-112 for the members of the team. The agents are each armed with VTP dart guns and are determined to kill Gabriel as rapidly as possible. They will use lethal force on anyone who interferes with their plans. While the team would likely be able to kill Gabriel if he was alone, with the characters' help, Gabriel should prevail.

Helping him defeat his enemies will convince Gabriel that the characters were sent by God. As long as the characters are careful to play along, he will agree to accompany them. If the characters have instead captured Gabriel, they will have to either defeat or flee the Proteus agents while carrying Gabriel's unconscious form with them. Unless the characters manage to kill or otherwise neutralize all members of the strike team, the survivors will report the characters' actions, and the characters will face further pursuit by other Proteus strike teams.

For added complexity, the Storyteller could decide that the novas who attack Gabriel and the characters are instead working for Project Utopia and merely wish to recapture him. This option works best if the characters are Aberrants who are working for or at least somewhat connected to Project Utopia. Before or possibly during the battle, the strike team will appeal to the characters to turn over Gabriel. They will relate how Gabriel is dangerously insane and how he has escaped from a hospital where he was undergoing treatment. The members of

the strike team will firmly believe this information, which directly contradicts what the characters know of Gabriel's escape. This contradiction provides an, admittedly slim, opportunity to possibly end the conflict peacefully and to perhaps convert others to the Aberrant cause. If he is conscious, Gabriel will know instantly if members of the Utopia strike team have truly begun to doubt their employers and will see this as an opportunity to lead others from the path of evil.

However, all of the above information assumes that the characters have managed to resist Gabriel's powers of coercion. If he catches them unawares, he will likely control them as he has many others. Instead of possible allies, Gabriel will see them as more followers sent to him by God. The characters will arrive at the Nevada compound as Gabriel's unwilling bodyguards. This result could also be a fascinating lead-in to the normal course of the adventure. Once Gabriel has arrived at the compound, he will divert much of his attention from the characters and concentrate on controlling his flock, deciding what he will do next and getting some much-needed sleep. At this point, the characters will be free from his control. Now, instead of being on the outside of the compound, the characters will be trapped inside with Gabriel and the rest of the followers. From here, they may attempt to help Gabriel escape or possibly communicate with and ally themselves to one of the factions outside.

Talking to Gabriel

If none of the players are interested in negotiations, the Storyteller should use Lauren Ahmir as the negotiator. However, the adventure will be considerably more interesting and complex if the characters actually spend a considerable amount of time talking to Gabriel or to his aid, Mary. These conversations will allow the characters to uncover what Gabriel actually knows about the undercover activities of Utopia and Proteus. However, assuming the Storyteller wishes to avoid destroying her game world in a vast plague, caution must be used when having the characters talk to Gabriel. Gabriel is insane, full of hatred for Project Utopia and (although he conceals it well) honestly terrified of being placed back in the slavery he just escaped from.

If he is threatened too often or actually believes that his compound is about to be attacked, he will release the plagues. If none of the players seems likely to be able to actually handle the complex and delicate task of talking with a paranoid madman, then it may be safest to have their characters actually talk exclusively with his aid, Mary Catanzaro (see Dramatis Personae for further information). Otherwise, the characters will alternate talking with Gabriel and with Mary, since Gabriel spends much of his time in prayer and tending to his flock.

Mary is devoted to Gabriel, but she also desperately wishes to find a non-violent solution to this situation. She doesn't want to see Gabriel harmed, but as the standoff progresses, she will become increasingly wor-

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ried about the safety of his 650 followers and about the possible plagues. Use Mary to warn the characters about the proper way to talk with Gabriel.

If they begin making threats, have her state in an angry and worried tone that she will not pass their statements on to Gabriel and that, if she did, he might do something rash. A few such warning should encourage the characters to handle the negotiations more carefully. If after numerous warnings the characters continue being belligerent and aggressive and insist on talking only to Gabriel, then let them, and make them face the consequences of their behavior. However, make sure the characters have adequate warning of the likely outcome of such actions.

Once a meaningful dialog has been established, Gabriel will spend most of his time ranting about the evils of Project Utopia and the coming of the apocalypse. He is more than willing to go on at length about such topics and will mention brief fragments of information about his captivity. See the setting material on page 81 for details. If the characters are polite and persistent, they can encourage him to talk about these incidents in greater detail. After talking about his own situation, he will provide the names of several other novas being held in a similar form of captivity. He will also talk in sad and angry terms about Slider's death and how a nova named Chiraben was responsible. Gabriel will then go on at length about how Chiraben is one of Proteus' chief demons. While nothing Gabriel says will be admissible in court, careful checking may be able to corroborate his information.

Gabriel is quite willing to talk with people he con-

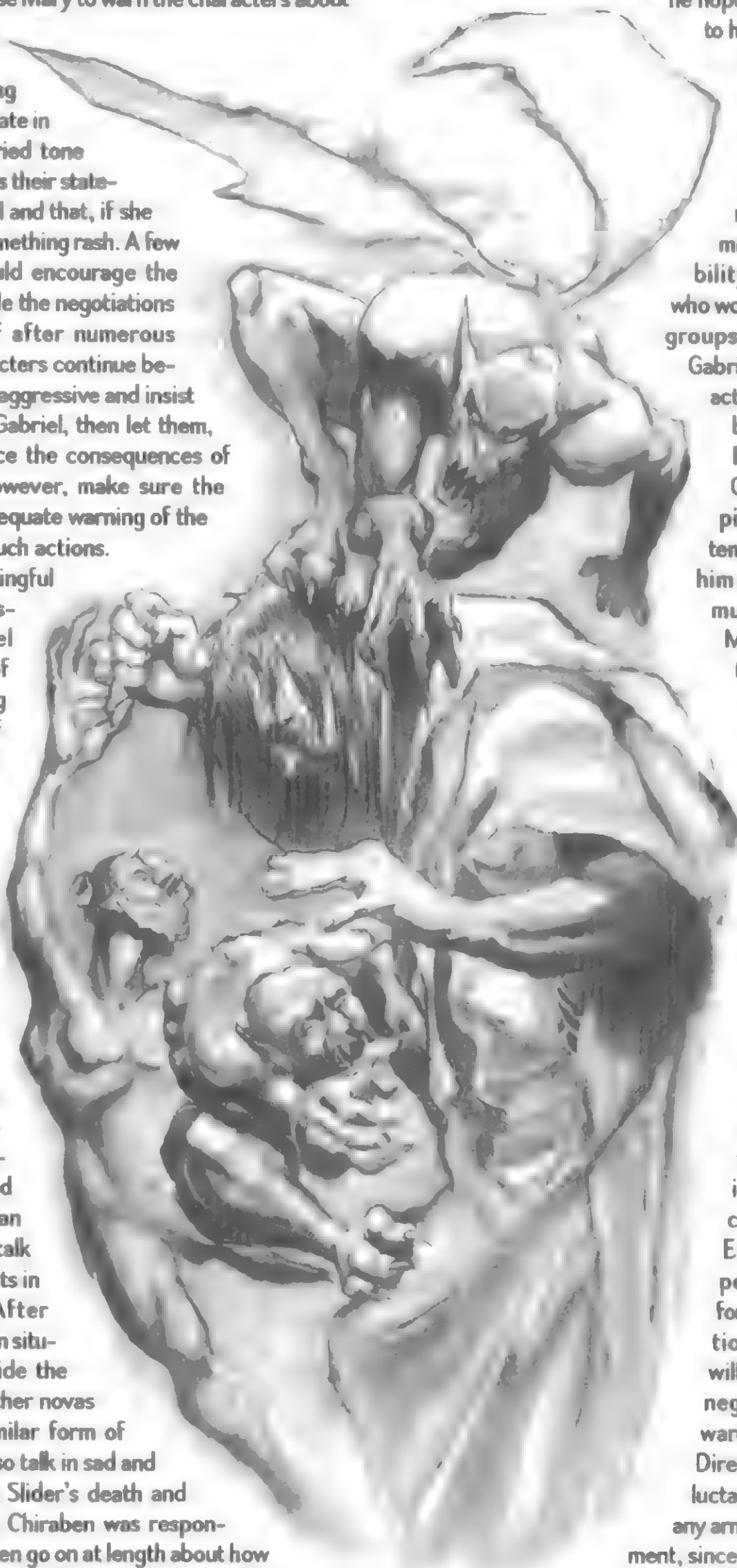
siders to be servants of evil, since he hopes to convert them to his cause. However,

he is completely unwilling to surrender to either Project Utopia or Project Proteus members. One, admittedly slim, possibility for characters who work for one of these groups is to convince Gabriel that they have actually been swayed by his arguments. Remember that Gabriel is not stupid. Characters attempting to convince him of their motives must succeed at a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll with a difficulty of +5.

Next, Gabriel will request that the characters personally meet with him inside the compound.

Once inside, the characters will be surrounded by Gabriel's bodyguards (see page 110 for details). In person, the difficulty of lying to Gabriel increases to +6. Read *Entering the Compound* on page 101 for further information. While Gabriel will not have the same negative feeling toward members of the Directive, he will be reluctant to surrender to any arm of the US government, since he believes that all worldly governments have been corrupted by Project Utopia.

If the characters belong to any of these groups, then their best hope of settling the situation in a peaceful



manner is through Mary. As negotiations continue, she will become increasingly scared. While her faith in God never waivers, she will begin to doubt Gabriel's sanity. Characters who make a Wits + Rapport roll at +2 difficulty will notice her feelings. Since Gabriel trusts her, he allows her to communicate with the negotiators at any time. Late at night, she can hold unmonitored conversations with the negotiators. If they are careful, the negotiators may be able to convince her to allow them inside the compound to capture Gabriel. The best way to convince Mary to help them is for the characters to emphasize the fact that Gabriel is threatening to kill up to a billion people. Mary is quite compassionate and is horrified by the idea of mass death. Once they have begun talking with Mary alone, another Wits + Rapport roll at a difficulty of +1 will allow the characters to realize that playing up the fact that Gabriel is clearly insane and that he needs medical and psychological help is also an excellent idea. If she agrees to help the characters, Mary will state numerous times that she will only do this if Gabriel's safety is guaranteed. However, lying to Mary is relatively easy (characters need only succeed at a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll with a difficulty of +2).

Teragen or Aberrant Characters Talking to Gabriel

If the characters are Teragen members or Aberrants, then they might actually have a chance to negotiate a peaceful solution with Gabriel. However, to do this, they must be able to communicate freely with Gabriel. If none of them can communicate with him secretly, the characters will have been given special blacktech communications gear to allow them to talk to Gabriel without being overheard by the various groups who are monitoring all normal communications.

Once secret negotiations have been opened, the key to success will be in how the characters present themselves. If they immediately announce their opposition to Project Utopia and agree with his characterization of this organization as the army of Satan, then Gabriel will be willing to consider some form of alliance. However, if the characters defend Project Utopia in any fashion, he may be willing to consider the characters as potential converts but not as allies. As such, he will invite them inside the compound, but will not agree to leave the compound with them.

If the characters manage to convince him of their sincerity, the next step is to discuss religion. Gabriel is unwilling to ally himself with heathens or unbelievers. He will ask a series of basic questions, such as if the characters accept the Divine Quantum Unity as their Savior, and if they believe in the cleansing redemption of the apocalypse. By this point, Gabriel wants to have more allies and will be thinking of the characters as possibly

being sent by God to help him in his hour of need. As long as the characters continue to agree with him, he will be mollified. Once these preliminary discussions are over, Gabriel will ask to meet with them and discuss their plans. Plans which include proposals to lock him up and attempt to treat his insanity will not be regarded favorably. Also, while Gabriel is becoming desperate, he is unwilling to work with people who have no useful plans or whose plans sound phony or foolish. Allow the characters to come up with some plan for how they will allegedly or actually work with Gabriel to spread the word of Project Utopia's evils, slay Utopia's leaders and then lead humanity into a righteous and cleansing apocalypse. Alternately, the characters may simply claim to have a plan and then attempt to capture Gabriel once they are inside his compound.

In either case, one or more of the characters will have to physically enter the compound. Remember that members of Project Proteus and the Directive are watching the compound and it's surroundings extremely carefully. Unless the characters have some official standing or possess some power like Teleport or Invisibility, getting inside the compound will be quite difficult. Even at night, anyone attempting to sneak into the compound must make a successful Dexterity + Stealth roll at +5 difficulty. Some form of violent or flashy distraction away from the compound will reduce the difficulty of this roll to +2 or +3 (depending on how serious the distraction is).

Once inside the compound, it will become even clearer to the character or characters talking to him that Gabriel is completely insane. Nevertheless, if they are careful, they should be able to persuade him to accompany them to some safe location. Don't let the characters get away without some form of conflict. If they aren't extremely convincing, Gabriel will back out at the last moment, and they will have to forcibly capture him.

Also, even if the characters managed to enter the compound without alerting anyone outside, one of the novas working for Project Proteus will eventually notice that there are additional quantum signatures inside the compound. Fearing that Gabriel has somehow obtained reinforcements, the Project Proteus team will attempt to enter the compound. The entire team will be flown in by Heavy (see page 112) to the location of the quantum signatures. Seconds later, the Proteus team will burst through the roof of the compound, directly over Gabriel. With allies at his back, Gabriel will remain confident and will not consider releasing the plagues.

Unaware of how Gabriel made contact with allies or how much these allies may know about Gabriel's captivity, the Proteus team will attempt to capture both Gabriel and the characters. Since they wish to question Gabriel, they will attempt to take him alive. Their first action will be to shoot him with a VTP dart (see p. 115). They will then attempt to restrain both him and the characters until he falls unconscious. Heavy will attempt to keep Gabriel busy, while the characters will have to fight

Blackout and Leo. Once Gabriel is unconscious, the Proteus team should be roughly an even match for the characters.

Entering the Compound

Sneaking in with inside help: If the characters can convince Mary to let them into the compound, then this process is relatively easy. Mary has around a dozen other allies who agree that Gabriel is likely unbalanced and who are willing to help turn him over for proper care. Mary will ask the characters to sneak up to the compound at 3 A.M.. Five of her allies will be on guard duty in that section of the compound, which will only leave one guard who is loyal to Gabriel. The characters must make Dexterity + Stealth checks at +1 difficulty to avoid alerting this guard but can otherwise enter without incident.

Sneaking in without help: The compound is well guarded by desperate people. Without inside aid, the only way to enter the compound undetected is through the use of various nova powers. Even in the dead of night, sneaking in would demand a Dexterity + Stealth roll at +4 difficulty to sneak up to and enter the compound without being detected. However, abilities such as Invisibility, Teleport or similar powers will allow the characters to enter the compound without being detected. As stated before, Gabriel's inhuman thrall over many of his followers renders them quite resistant to outright mental control. Any attempt to use Domination, Empathic Manipulation, Hypnosis or any Mega-Charisma or Mega-Manipulation enhancements on any of his followers is at +2 difficulty.

Inside The Compound

Regardless of how they entered, once inside the compound, the characters will see that conditions inside are far from perfect. While the compound is well built and well maintained, it is currently rather overcrowded. See The Setting on page 91 for further details. Even late at night, sneaking through the corridors is far from easy (Dexterity + Stealth at +3 difficulty). Unless the characters have nova powers to allow them to remain undetected and to find Gabriel's location, it will be difficult to locate him without inside help.

If Mary and her allies are helping them, the characters will be lead directly to the central chapel, where Gabriel and several of his most devout followers are spending the night in prayer. Otherwise, the characters must attempt to find this location on their own. If they are detected, a general alarm will go out, and several dozen fanatics will mob them. Only about a third of Gabriel's followers are armed and these people only have pistols and a few shotguns. However, the close quarters and large numbers of opponents should make this a challenging fight, especially if the characters do not wish simply to kill everyone around them. During this battle, allow anyone with Mega-Wits to make a Wits + Rapport roll of difficulty +2 to understand that, if they actually win the battle and escape, Gabriel may feel so threatened that he is likely to release the plagues.

If the characters lose or surrender, they will be restrained and then immediately taken to Gabriel. This scene of course, provides numerous opportunities for last minute escapes, during which the captives suddenly turn the tables on their captors and seize or kill Gabriel. If the characters win, they will be able to escape. However, unless someone talking to Gabriel can quickly convince him that the assault on the compound was a rogue effort which will not be repeated, he will decide the End Times have come and release the plagues. A Manipulation + Subterfuge roll at +5 difficulty will be necessary to convince him. However, don't base his decision purely on one roll. Allow the characters to talk to him and attempt to explain. If they can come up with a good enough story, then reduce the difficulty of the roll by as much as +3. If no one else thinks of it, an aid can suggest that the "evildoers" who attacked the compound be turned over to Gabriel's people for "trial." Once again, this will give the characters a chance to get free and attack Gabriel.

Further Conflict Options

If the Storyteller feels that the scenario is not challenging enough or if she simply wants to liven up things a bit with some conflict between the various factions, she can use any or all of the following options, depending upon the characters' allegiance. The Teragen agents and the Proteus team are designed to be run using the same three nova character write-ups: Blackout, Leo and Heavy. See pp. 111-112 for information on these characters.

Storytellers should normally attempt to run only The Teragen Intervenes or The Proteus Hit Squad. Using both segments may well tax the characters' resources too severely. If the Storyteller wishes to use both scenes, she should use the existing characters for The Teragen Intervenes and create a second set of Project Proteus operatives which are evenly matched with the characters. The only limitation when creating these novas is that they must be able to arrive inside the compound immediately after Gabriel has been knocked unconscious.

Nuke 'Em Till They Glow

General Weston is fed up with attempting to talk to an insane megalomaniac and is honestly quite terrified that everyone and everything he cares about will be destroyed by a horrible plague. Late one night, he orders his two most trusted baseline aides to sneak the neutron bomb up to the edge of the compound. Either by overhearing the general giving the order, by observing the somewhat distressed manner of the two aids (who realize that they are being sent on a suicide mission) or by seeing two people sneaking out of the camp to the compound at 3:00 A.M., the characters notice what is going on. Depending upon when the characters notice the preparations, they may attempt to talk General Weston out of setting off the bomb, attempt to talk the aids into

going AWOL or simply intercept the aides and prevent them from deploying the bomb.

The general is unconvinced by the data that indicates that the bomb will not completely destroy the plagues. However, if the characters can convince him that the situation will be resolved within the next 24 hours, he will order his people to call off the raid. Only characters who are also members of the Directive or who are important members of Project Utopia can convince the general to delay the bombing. Characters who have less status must use more direct means.

The general's aides, Captain Michael Dickerson and Major Roberta Elliott are both exceedingly loyal to General Weston. Unless the characters can convince them that setting off the bomb is likely to be ineffective, the use of nova powers or force will be required to prevent them from going on the mission. However, they will just be replaced by other aids unless the characters also secure the bomb. Fortunately, the two aides can deliver it to the characters instead of taking it to the compound. If the characters steal or destroy the bomb, the general will need at least 36 hours to acquire a new one, since he is getting it through unofficial Directive channels.

The Teragen Intervenes

If the characters belong to any organization other than the Teragen, then the action could be livened up considerably by having Teragen agents show up and attempt to either free or capture Gabriel. This incident will give the characters a chance to fight powerful novas and may present them an unexpected method of capturing Gabriel.

Unless one of the characters can sense the use of quantum powers and is extremely observant (the Quantum Attunement enhancement and five successes on a Perception + Awareness roll or an equal number of successes using Node), their first evidence that something is amiss is when one of the Project Utopia technicians reports that the Spatial Stress Indicator has registered the use of Teleport inside the compound. The Spatial Stress Indicator (SSI) is an experimental device whose existence is still secret. No one outside of a few members of Utopia and Proteus are aware that use of Warps and Teleport can be tracked. See page 114 for details on the SSI.

Blackout (see *Dramatis Personae* on page 111) has teleported inside the compound and is attempting to finalize a deal with Gabriel. Furthermore, the SSI will indicate that the teleporter left from an unknown location no more than 10 kilometers away. Blackout cannot teleport Gabriel or anyone else with her. However, don't allow the characters to know this. Allow them to worry that Gabriel is about to vanish from under their noses. Instead, Blackout is attempting negotiate an agreement so that her allies can sneak Gabriel out of the compound in return for him agreeing to work with the Teragen. At this point, a nova with Telepathy or some form of long-range sensory capacity can also detect the other two

Teragen novas waiting at their camp in the mountains three kilometers from the compound. Negotiations with Blackout will take several hours. If the characters can locate and defeat the other Teragen members during this time, interrogation of the other Terats will reveal that Blackout cannot simply teleport Gabriel along with her and that she plans to reappear on the edge of the Teragen camp once her negotiations are complete. Capturing Blackout should be relatively easy if the characters have the element of surprise.

Similarly, if a character with ESP, Mega-Perception or some similar ability listens in on Gabriel's conversation with Blackout, then he will learn the details of the plan and the approximate location of the Teragen camp. A careful and stealthy search should then reveal its exact location. Assuming the characters successfully capture the Teragen agents, impersonating these agents and thereby convincing Gabriel to accompany them willingly could prove to be a useful plan, as long as they can make sure Gabriel suspects nothing.

If the characters do not stop the Teragen agents, the negotiations will proceed successfully, and then, several hours later, Heavy will fly into the compound and carry Gabriel back to the two other Teragen agents. Give any characters looking for such activity a Perception + Awareness roll at difficult +2 to notice Heavy entering or leaving.

If the characters search the Teragen camp, they will recover some highly advanced surveillance gear and partial recordings of various conversations between Lauren Ahmir and Gabriel Melchior. The information in these recordings provides a detailed, if somewhat disjointed account of Gabriel's treatment by Project Proteus and his accusations about Chiraben killing Slider. If questioned, the Teragen agents will state that they planned to release this information to show the world the way Project Utopia really treats novas.

The Project Proteus Hit Squad

Both to make certain that he does not escape again and to prevent him from revealing incriminating information, Project Proteus has no intention of allowing Gabriel to be taken into custody by any other organization. Using advanced surveillance devices, Project Proteus agents have been secretly observing and listening to everything which occurs inside the compound. If the characters kill Gabriel, the Proteus team will not intervene. However, if the characters merely use VTPs to render Gabriel unconscious, the Proteus team will arrive as soon as Gabriel is incapacitated. Blackout will teleport in and, a turn later, Heavy will fly in carrying Leo. The Proteus agents will first present high-level Project Utopia IDs and request that the characters turn Gabriel over to them. If the characters refuse, the Proteus team will attempt to subdue the characters and take Gabriel. Heavy will attempt to grab Gabriel and fly away, while the other two attempt to keep the characters busy.

Knowing the stakes involved, the Proteus team will fight until they are killed or taken captive. They will use lethal attacks but will not attempt to kill or capture incapacitated characters. If the characters appear to be winning, then the Proteus team will instead attempt to kill Gabriel. Once the Proteus team has grabbed or killed Gabriel, they will immediately attempt to leave. They will continue to attack the characters only if the characters attempt to prevent their departure.

Taking Out Gabriel

Once the characters actually get to Gabriel, the question is what to do with him. He is extremely tough and powerful. Unless one of the characters possesses either Stun Attack, Disrupt or Disintegrate at an extremely high level or Mega-Strength four or five and the Crush enhancement, as well as the ability to surprise Gabriel with the attack, it will be impossible to take him out with a single blow. However, lengthy battles are impractical. If Gabriel appears to be losing, he will release his plagues in a last ditch effort at retribution.

The characters will be told that Triton Foundation physicians suspect that he will only need a very short time (one full turn, actually) to release the plagues. He will cease all other actions and begin concentrating on his initiative number, and then, he will release a vast glowing cloud of deadly microbes and fall over dying on his initiative number for the next turn. If he begins this process the characters' only hope is to either Warp him to some air-tight location or kill him before the be-

ginning of the next turn.

Gabriel's resistance to psychic attack makes options like Domination extremely risky, so there are only a few methods of dealing with a being of his power. If any of the characters has the Warp power it might be possible to Warp him into some form of pre-prepared, sealed cell for further observation and study. Failing that, the characters' best option to subdue or kill him is to use Virally Tailored Poison (VTP) darts.

VTPs (see p. 115 for further details) provide a reasonable and limited method of incapacitating Gabriel. Characters who work for Project Utopia, Project Proteus or the Directive will have been issued VTP dart guns. Aberrants or Teragen characters have been given VTP dart guns that were stolen from a courier. In either case, one shot with a VTP dart should render Gabriel unconscious.

However, once the VTP dart has been used, the scenario is far from over. Even with the most advanced drug technology possible, it is exceedingly difficult to stop someone as powerful as Gabriel. Once the VTP has been used Gabriel will still have seven turns during which he can act without penalty. At the end of this time, he will simply fall over.

When the characters are issued the VTP dart guns, they will be told that it takes a short time to work and that



during this time they should keep Gabriel busy so he does not have a chance to notice the faint weakness a VTP dart produces or he might use his vast powers to neutralize its affects. Essentially, the characters must engage Gabriel in a fight until he falls over. During this fight, they must also not seem too close to winning, since he might become desperate and release the plagues.

Fortunately, Gabriel Melchior is an incredibly powerful nova, so there is little chance that the characters will actually provide a significant threat to him. Unless Gabriel is already engaged in fighting the characters, he will almost certainly notice when the VTP dart hits him. If he is not already in combat, he will grow quite angry when the dart hits and demand to know what hit him. If the characters do not provide a sufficiently good response, Gabriel may grow worried and release the plagues.

If the characters seem to be an actual threat or if they arrive in the company of several tanks and squads of heavily armed soldiers, Gabriel will feel threatened. However, when facing three to six moderately powered novas,

Gabriel's confidence in his abilities and his belief that he is the chosen warrior of God will convince him that he will quickly and easily beat his opponents. Unless this confidence is broken by several seriously damaging attacks by the characters, he will continue to fight until he falls over from the effects of the dart. Unfortunately, the characters will not know exactly when the drug will affect him. During the fight, emphasize that the primary need is to keep Gabriel busy. Characters with Mega-Intelligence will realize that short quips and other in-combat conversation combined with extremely flashy attacks and defenses would be the best way to keep Gabriel distracted.

This final fight should be a climactic battle, with Gabriel using his powers to the fullest. If the Storytellers feels that having a single opponent, even one as powerful as Gabriel, will not be a sufficiently interesting challenge for all of the characters, then have Gabriel's first action be to use Body Manipulation on several of his bodyguards. Ad-

just the number of these bodyguards as seems appropriate to the number and power level of the



characters. These bodyguards (see page 110 for further details) have already been provided with five dots in all physical attributes. His use of Body Manipulation on them will mimic the affects of soma, with no risk of death for the subjects. The bodyguards will all have a temporary Mega-Strength of one. Facing Gabriel and two or three enhanced guards should provide a serious challenge for nearly any group of characters.

Endgame

Success

Regardless of which group the characters belong to, success involves capturing or killing Gabriel Melchior. Once he is dead, in custody or simply spirited off by defiant renegades, the situation at the Nevada compound is largely over. If he is captured or killed, his enhanced bodyguards will continue to fight until they are defeated, but everyone else will back off. If he has been killed, his other followers will all go into a mild form of shock when his mental thrall over them is broken. They will recover in a few turns and some will seek vengeance upon the characters. However, at this point, they will be exceedingly demoralized, and any serious show of force will cause them to surrender. If Gabriel has been captured, then the characters will need to fight their way out past several hundred angry and protective followers.

In either case, the followers are armed only with small arms and unwilling to risk harming their Redeemer. Dealing with the followers should be relatively easy, if the characters are careful. Gabriel's followers will also surrender rapidly when confronted with the full power of several novas. The Storyteller can play this scene as a bitter fight by people seeking vengeance for the death or capture of their leader or a disoriented mob that has suddenly be released from Gabriel's mental thrall.

CDC operatives in sealed suits will move in the moment the compound has been secured. All of the followers and the characters (if they are still present at the compound) will spend three days in quarantine being poked and prodded by nervous doctors. At the end of this time, everyone will be declared to be in nearly perfect health. The characters will be released, and the followers will be detained for legal and psychiatric evaluation.

Publicity

Shortly after the characters are released, the details of the situation in Nevada will appear on the OpNet. While it was possible to keep a news blackout on the situation while it was going on, the events around Gabriel's compound are simply too noticeable to keep completely secret. While the involvement of the Directive and Project Proteus will never be revealed unless one of the characters leaks the information, the fact that a vastly powerful and insane nova threatened the entire world and that the situation was resolved through cooperation between the US government and Project Utopia will briefly make headlines. Fortunately, the true magni-

tude of the plagues will never come out. In the end, the results of this revelation will be mixed. The general public will see just how dangerous a powerful and highly tainted nova can be. However, if the situation was resolved successfully, the public will also remain confident that various governments working with Project Utopia can successfully contain such threats. Nevertheless, a few people will begin to associate powerful novas and dangerous insanity, so worry about novas will increase.

If Aberrants or Terats captured Gabriel, Project Utopia will claim that Gabriel was killed. If no one comes forward to contradict this claim, then all is well. However, if anyone produces proof that Gabriel is still alive, Project Utopia will take a major blow to its prestige. They will be able to make it look like they were fooled and not be caught in a lie, but public confidence in Utopia will still suffer. If the characters are Aberrants they could greatly harm Project Utopia's image by simultaneously announcing Gabriel's allegations against Project Utopia and the fact that he is still alive. While the first can be dismissed as the ravings of a lunatic and the second as a mistake rather than a lie, taken together, these two pieces of information are enough to start an investigation of Project Utopia's activities by the UN.

If the characters captured Gabriel, he will be turned over to the Triton Foundation, the CDC, Aberrant researchers or Teragen scientists for evaluation. Regardless of who is examining him, the results are the same. Gabriel is heavily tainted and dangerously insane. No treatment or therapy can help him, and he is a constant danger to everyone around him. If he is held by the Triton Foundation or the CDC, he will make several escape attempts, and only the fact that he's kept heavily drugged will prevent them from succeeding. Within two weeks, Triton Foundation or CDC researchers will inform the characters that he must be euthanized.

If he is held by either the Aberrants or the Teragen, the results are much the same. Even sociopathic Teragen members like Shrapnel will rapidly realize that Gabriel is too uncontrollable and dangerous a weapon to use. If the characters belong to the Aberrants, the Storyteller may want to use a somewhat more poignant end for Gabriel. During the last of the attempted treatments, after the characters have realized his case is hopeless, Storytellers might want to allow the treatment to bring Gabriel back to sanity and normalcy for a few minutes. At this point, Gabriel realizes that he is not in the custody of Project Utopia and that he has become a dangerous and seemingly demonic entity. He will pray and beg the Quantum Unity to forgive him, thank the characters for bringing his mind briefly back from the pit of Hell. He will then ask them to leave. Once they are gone, he will activate his powers to their fullest extent and dissolve himself in a wash of glowing Quantum energy. When the characters return, only a small pile of dust and ash will remain.

If the characters are Teragen members who decide to keep Gabriel alive and use him to blackmail the

world, allow Gabriel to have a brief moment of sanity where he decries the characters' motives. He will loudly claim that they care nothing for the kingdom of Heaven and merely seek base and worldly power. Yelling that he will serve no master but God, Gabriel will then destroy himself in a similar fashion. The only difference is that he will not ask the characters to leave. Unless they flee as soon as he starts to glow, everyone present will take four levels of Aggravated damage from his destruction (six levels if they actually attempt to grab or otherwise touch him when he is disintegrating himself).

Regardless of his actual fate, unless the characters managed to fake Gabriel's death in some fashion, the search for him will continue. Despite the revelations the characters may release concerning his treatment by Project Proteus, every government and law-enforcement agency on the planet still fears that Gabriel may release his plagues. The pressure to find him will intensify until and unless the characters turn him over to some official organization or bring forward proof of his death.

Blowing the Whistle

At this point, the only remaining issue is what the characters do with the information they have received from and about Gabriel. Loyal members of Project Proteus will bury this information. Members of the Directive will turn it over to their superiors, who will then use it as a bargaining chip in their negotiations with Project Utopia. Loyal members of Project Utopia will turn it over to their superiors, who will then assure the characters that this information was all a vast tapestry of lies and insanity. Characters who investigate further will be politely told that an official investigation is already underway and that their efforts are unnecessary.

Characters who belong to Project Utopia and continue to be dissatisfied with such answers will be approached by Aberrants working inside the Project, who will offer to share information. This situation could be an excellent way to have the characters recruited into the Aberrants and possibly for some lengthy and heated debates among the characters about Project Utopia and the Aberrants.

Characters who belong to the Teragen will be encouraged by their fellow members to make this information public, so that Project Utopia can be shown to be the organization of evil and incompetent slavers that it really is. If the characters are Aberrants, their fellows will urge caution in making this information public but will ultimately leave the decision on whether or not to release it to the characters.

Unless the characters are members, the Aberrants will leak portions of secret recordings they made of conversations between the negotiators and Gabriel which reveal some of his treatment to the OpNet. If the characters were relatively circumspect in their questions, this information will be much less incriminating than if the

characters were relatively careless in what they asked.

Regardless of who does so, if the information about Gabriel is released to the OpNet, it will result in a widespread public outcry against Project Utopia. However, without proof, none of Gabriel's allegations are more than just talk. The statements he made concerning Slider's murder will become common gossip, but most people will believe that statements made by a large, obviously beneficent organization are considerably more trustworthy than the words of a lunatic, repeated by terrorists and dissidents. The only concrete scandals that can come out of this incident are those purely relating to Gabriel. He was obviously kidnapped and held against his will, and according to his statements, he was the subject of dangerous experiments which may well have aggravated his insanity.

Just as obviously, Project Utopia officials will point out, Gabriel was already exceedingly powerful and dangerously insane, and the experiments performed on him at the Bahrain facility were part of an effort to cure or, at least, treat his condition. While there will be significant public outrage, any criminal charges will be limited to ethical violations by physicians and similar charges.

If the characters also release statements about Project Proteus' use of Gabriel in Operation Genesis, Project Utopia will quickly deny the existence of any organized body called Project Proteus and will instead point to a few overly zealous and irresponsible agents whose unsanctioned actions have been made to seem part of some vast conspiracy. If the characters are persistent enough in their claims and start presenting any of the additional evidence the Aberrants have accumulated about Project Proteus, Utopia leaders will claim that the irresponsible agents in their midst may even have ties to the Teragen.

If the characters and their organization persist in their accusations and offer any proof, Project Utopia will change its tactics. Any Proteus members identified by Gabriel, as well as a number of inconvenient low- and mid-level Proteus members will be publicly denounced by Project Utopia and subsequently tried in a UN court. However, the (largely blameless) top ranks of Project Utopia will remain untouched by these revelations, and the heads of Proteus will vanish into the shadows. Public opinion of Project Utopia will drop somewhat. However, the organization itself will survive, and the Triton Foundation will announce a number of important medical breakthroughs, including a cure for diabetes, four months later.

Failure

No matter who the characters work for, the results of failure are the same. Gabriel Melchior releases a vast airborne cloud of viruses, bacteria and prions. Angry at his captivity and betrayal and determined to punish the wicked before he can be taken back into captivity, Gabriel actually destroys himself in this process. Any characters

present when he releases the plagues will see his body dissolve into a huge, initially luminous, cloud which is gradually dispersed by the wind. At this point, the world is facing a series of horrific plagues that will rival the Black Death of the 14th century.

If General Weston uses the neutron bomb, the compound will be destroyed in a flash of blinding light, but once the blast has cleared, a smaller luminous cloud will be seen to rapidly dissipate. The CDC officials will announce that, before he was destroyed, Gabriel must have released the plagues. By some unknown means the most radiation resistant of the viruses have survived and while the plagues will clearly be much less severe than it might have been, the world is still facing a deadly threat.

If the Storyteller doesn't want to work a plague of biblical proportions into her chronicle, there are a few other options. As stated earlier, the compound is in a particularly bleak portion of Nevada with Las Vegas being the only major city nearby. The prevailing winds will blow the plague cloud into Las Vegas in a little more than an hour. Once there, it will infect numerous people, who will then spread it rapidly throughout the United States and ultimately

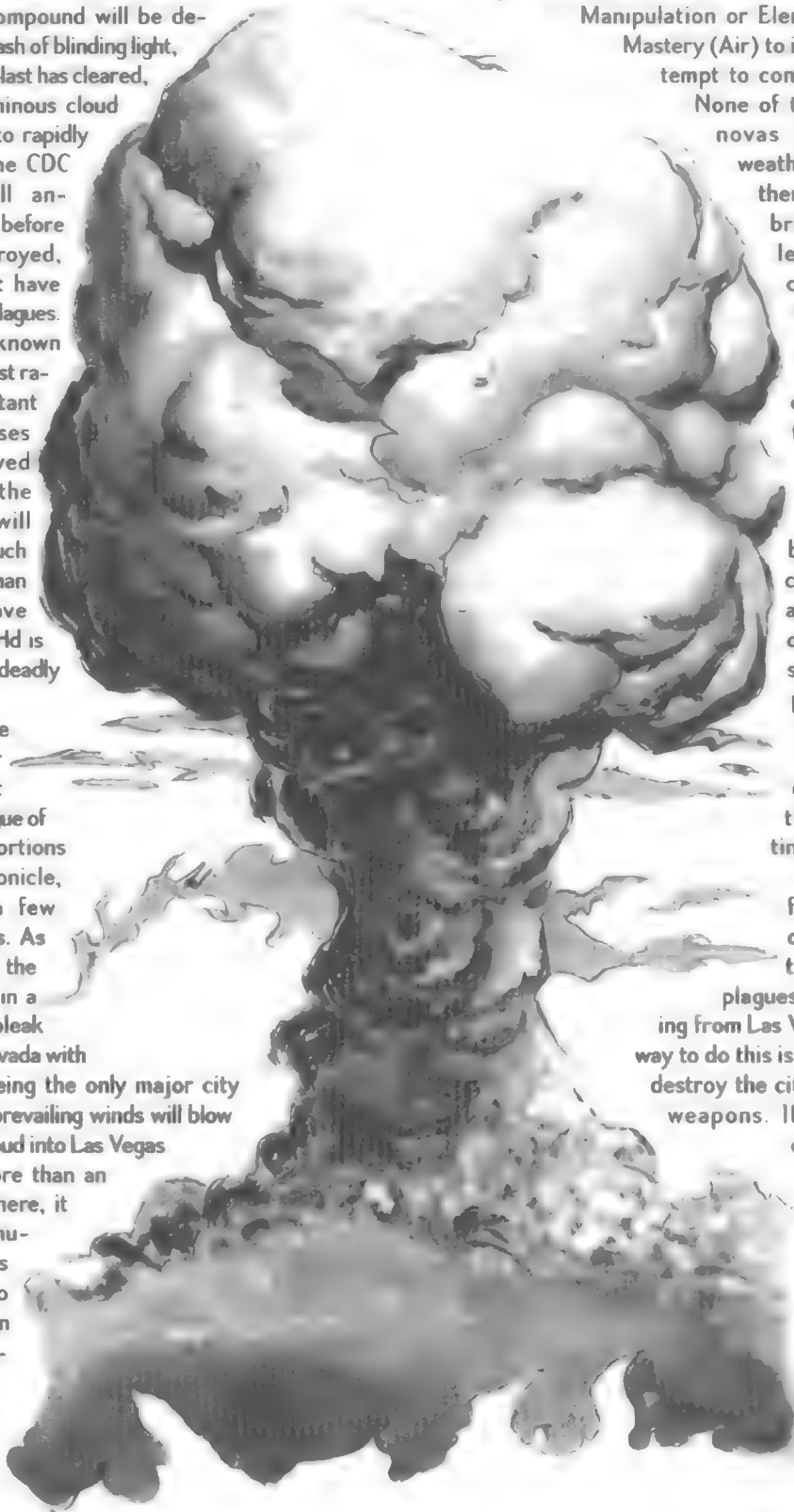
over the world.

If the plagues can be prevented from reaching Las Vegas or if it can be prevented from spreading from Las Vegas, then the world might be spared. The only way to prevent the plagues from reaching Las Vegas would be for a character with Weather

Manipulation or Elemental Anima/Mastery (Air) to immediately attempt to contain the cloud.

None of the Storyteller novas present have weather control, and there isn't time to bring one in. At least four successes are needed on the weather control roll to successfully contain the cloud. At this point, more than half of the baselines in the compound and among the various groups outside the compound are doomed, but the diseases can be effectively quarantined.

If this effort fails, the only other option is to prevent the plagues from spreading from Las Vegas. The only way to do this is to immediately destroy the city with nuclear weapons. If none of the characters come up with the idea, one of the CDC workers can mention it. The President of the United States must authorize such a strike. However, mem-



bers of the Directive or Team Tomorrow will have little trouble getting in direct contact with him (or her). The next step is for one or more of the characters to persuade the President to drop a bomb that will kill several million US citizens to prevent the death of hundreds of millions more. If possible, allow all of the characters to talk on a speakerphone, and play up the situation for as much anguish and soul-searching as it deserves. In the end, the characters are directly responsible for the death of millions of people, but they did save the world from a series of terrible plagues. They will have achieved at best a very bitter-sweet victory.

Plague

The following campaign ideas are quite drastic and could completely alter the game world. Before enacting any of the suggestions here, Storytellers should carefully consider what the following events will mean for the game world.

If the characters fail to stop Gabriel Melchior from bringing about his own apocalypse, the United States is faced with a catastrophe of unprecedented proportions. What happens now will depend both upon what the characters have done already and what they do in the first hours and days of the outbreak.

If the plagues are released and the neutron bomb is not used, then between 40 and 100 million US citizens will be dead within three weeks. During this same time, the plagues will likely spread into Mexico and Canada and will almost certainly spread worldwide. The total worldwide death toll will be between 200 and 900 million people. Allow the characters actions to affect the spread of the plagues. Immediately after the plagues are released, characters who use their powers to quarantine the region or to slow the airborne dispersal of the diseases can easily reduce the impact of the diseases. Later on, helping to ground planes at airports and to otherwise prohibit travel will help prevent a national epidemic from becoming a worldwide disaster.

However, no matter how well the characters respond, once Gabriel releases his diseases, millions will die. The following weeks will be full of scenes of horror and tragedy. Storytellers should make certain to present the full impact of this disaster. Various movies such as *Outbreak* or novels such as *The Stand* by Stephen King may help Storytellers comprehend the nature of such an epidemic. During the plagues, be sure to introduce the characters to a wide variety of individuals. Let them encounter heroic physicians working even when they have become infected, panicked civilians desperate to flee from the spread of the plagues, greedy looters eager to gain wealth as civilization crumbles and unscrupulous con men offering worthless patent-medicine cures to desperate victims.

In Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and other large cities in the United States, chaos will reign. As one per-

son in three or four dies a horrible death, emergency services will be totally overwhelmed by the massive surge of violence and panic brought on by the epidemic. During the height of the disaster, the largest US cities will become little better than scenes of anarchy and devastation, as power failures, traffic jams and open violence add to the death toll. Even groups like the Army and the National Guard will be overwhelmed, as many soldiers refuse orders to enter plague zones, while other soldiers succumb and die on duty.

Any novas who can either affect the emotions and reactions of masses of people or who can produce large-scale physical effects can save large areas from total destruction. However, there will always be another neighborhood to save. Allow the characters to understand the vast magnitude of the problems, but also make sure to have grateful citizens tearfully thank them for their efforts. Remember that the characters are likely to be accumulating large amounts of temporary Taint as they push their powers to help save more people. However, even fast and effective intervention by novas will still leave large areas of many US cities in ruins.

The diseases themselves are also quite terrible. Death usually occurs within 40 to 48 hours after infection. Perhaps worst of all, all novas are immune, so the characters can merely stand and watch as millions die around them. Novas who possess Healing or Biomanipulation can cure victims or even make people immune to the disease, but such powers only affect one individual at a time. Any nova believed to be able to cure plague victims will certainly be mobbed by desperate individuals and may face violence if he claims to be unable to cure the frantic thousands coming to him for treatment.

Storytellers should provide descriptions of OpNet disaster coverage but also make sure that the events personally affect all of the characters.

If General Weston used the neutron bomb, the results will still be terrible but more limited in scope. The flash of radiation will destroy most of the diseases. The death toll in the US will only range between 10 and 20 million with a worldwide death toll of between 30 and 100 million. Over 10 million Americans will still die in the worst disaster in US history, but some degree of order will be maintained even during the worst portions of the crisis. The results will resemble the LA riots of 1992. Looting and violence will be widespread, but rapid intervention by powerful novas and groups like the Army and the National Guard will be able to restore order within a week or two. The entire US will still be a disaster area once the crisis is over, but recovery will be much more rapid, and basic services will be restored within a week after the plagues are cured.

Regardless of the magnitude of the plagues, if the President is currently a nova then the characters will face even more stress. As advisors to the President, and possibly including the President him or herself, characters will be called upon to enact martial law, to make speeches

to panicked civilians and to lend aid and comfort in the worst affected regions. In the midst of this disaster, public figures will face occasional attacks by panicked individuals looking for someone to blame. Under such circumstances, the President and her advisors could emerge from the crisis as heroes and saviors or as villains and incompetents. Little middle ground will be possible, but the choice is largely up to how the characters respond.

The Aftermath

Within three weeks, nova physicians working for the Triton Foundation will have developed vaccines which can be aerially sprayed over affected regions. At this point, it's time to pick up the pieces. If the neutron bomb was not used the devastation produced in the US will be immense. Even basic services like food delivery, water and power will take more than a month to restore in some cities, and once again, novas will be necessary for the survival of millions. As the cities nearest the initial outbreak, portions of Los Angeles and Las Vegas will become vast refugee camps for the millions who lost their homes during the riots and panic.

The entire world will take several years to recover, and if the neutron bomb was not used, the United States will immediately cease to be a major world power. Much like Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States will be a former world power which will become dependent upon shipments of food and medicine for at least a decade and will take almost a century to gain its previous level of prosperity. If the neutron bomb was used, then the US economy will experience a sharp downturn, and the US will take several years to recover, but within five years, it will have rebuilt and attained its previous level of prosperity.

Once the crisis is past, there will be an immediate investigation into the cause of the disaster. The exact circumstances of the event and the events leading up to The Miracle loosing the plagues will have an important impact on the future perception of novas throughout the world. Regardless of whether the death toll was 10 million or 900 million, people will be looking for someone to blame. While Gabriel is the obvious choice, he's dead. However, he was a nova. Many people will be quick to try to blame all novas for this disaster.

In determining the outcome of this investigation, the characters alliance and their actions will be equally important. If the characters are discovered to be members of either the Aberrants or the Teragen and they were involved in causing the disaster, then they will have dealt a near-fatal blow to their organization. The public will now see the characters' organization as nothing less than a band of psychotic mass-murderers. Over much of the world, suspected members will be hunted down like dogs. Also, few baselines understand the difference between the Teragen and the Aberrants and consider them

both to be groups of anti-Utopia novas. If either group is blamed for the plagues, both groups will suffer greatly. Project Utopia and Project Proteus will also have much to gain if the proximate cause of the disaster can be placed on either the Aberrants or the Teragen. Any claims by Aberrants about possible corruption in Project Utopia will be largely ignored. Few people care about the politics of mass-murderers.

In many ways, having such a disaster blamed on the Teragen or the Aberrants could end up being a great boon for Project Utopia. Utopia, which was very prominent in relief efforts before the plagues, will be increasingly seen as the bastion which protects civilization from the threats posed by dangerously insane, rebel novas. In many nations, including the US, all novas will be required to submit to frequent tests and checkups administered by Utopian personnel. Project Proteus could even emerge partially from the shadows and proclaim itself the first line of defense against rogue novas, usurping Team Tomorrow's position and replacing T2M's heroic idealism with a grim determination to never allow a similar holocaust to occur.

Any novas who protest or rebel against Utopia's domination will end up being branded dangerous psychotics. Within a year or two, Utopia will be much more firmly entrenched than before, and its public support will be assured. Even if the characters belong to Project Utopia or Project Proteus, if they are careful, and rather unscrupulous, they may be able to pin the blame for the plagues upon the Aberrants or the Teragen. Since there are few, if any, baseline survivors from the region around the Nevada compound, doing this may end up being relatively easy.

If instead the blame comes to rest on Project Utopia members or associates like Project Proteus agents, then the resulting backlash will affect all novas, especially if Gabriel's comments about his treatment at the hands of Project Proteus and the Triton Foundation comes to light. Project Utopia's shining successes of the past will be forgotten. It and, by association, all novas will be seen as dangerously unstable maniacs. While the Zurich Accord will not be revoked, in most nations novas will be heavily discriminated against, and in the United States, Canada and Mexico, those who don't flee will be slain by mobs. If there is currently a nova President of the United States, he or she will either flee or be overthrown by a widespread grass-roots revolution. The government which replaces him or her will be harsh and dictatorial and will explicitly deny novas basic civil rights. With the exception of a few nations, like Japan, which will shelter displaced novas, the entire world will turn against them, and the campaign will likely focus on survival and heroism in a world which now loathes their kind.

Dramatis Personae

Director Lauren Ahmir

Background: After working for Scotland Yard as a successful hostage negotiator for almost a decade, Ms. Ahmir joined Project Utopia in 2005. During the last four years, she has built her reputation for excellence by successfully resolving almost a dozen hostage situations, including three involving nova terrorists. She is fundamentally apolitical and has little interest in the accusations that some are already making against Project Utopia. She knows that the work she is doing is vitally important, and Project Utopia supports this work.

Ms. Ahmir enjoys working with novas and secretly hopes to someday erupt. She does an excellent job of gaining criminals' trust and keeping them talking. However, she divides the world into criminals and citizens and has no sympathy for anyone who takes hostages. The idea that Project Utopia could be in any way responsible for the current situation involving Gabriel would disturb her greatly.

Mary Catanzaro

Background: Mary has been Gabriel's close friend for the past 12 years. Always a deeply religious person, she joined the CIE in 1999 and convinced Gabriel to join a few months later. When Gabriel's powers erupted in 2004, Mary was certain that the hand of God had touched him. When Gabriel took over the CIE a year later, she was his strongest supporter. Mary's Willpower of nine allowed her to be one of the few people who was able to view his behavior objectively, further helping her to be an effective aide. Her resistance to his powers also meant that she was the first person to notice his increasing instability. When Project Proteus abducted him, she was grateful that God had taken Gabriel home before his problems became worse. Once he was gone, she took over acting leadership of the church. During the past year, she has striven to keep the church true to his ideals.

Finding out that Gabriel was still alive and had been held captive was a great shock for her. She immediately contacted the church's most loyal followers, including Gabriel's bodyguards, and requested them to come to the Nevada compound immediately. She believes Gabriel's story about his abduction, but she is also growing increasingly certain that he desperately needs help after his ordeal. She passionately believes that the End Times are coming soon. However, she is beginning to doubt that Gabriel's plan for a vast plague is truly a part of the final battle between good and evil. She is currently torn between her desire to help Gabriel and her growing fear that millions of innocent people may die for no reason.

General Alain Weston

Background: General Weston was among the founding members of the Directive. His work in intelligence during the Cold War had given him contacts throughout the intelligence community. With the formation of the Directive, General Weston left the Army and ostensibly joined the FBI as a part of their newly formed nova task force, a front for numerous Directive operations. General Weston has never trusted novas, and while he recognizes their usefulness, he has staunchly opposed the appointment of any novas to high-ranking positions in the Directive.

General Weston has been growing increasingly worried about Project Utopia's agenda. He regards it as little more than a nova-run plot to control the world. While he is willing to work with Project Utopia representatives during the current crisis, he does not trust them. He wishes to end the current standoff as rapidly as possible. Although he will avoid letting anyone else realize this, the primary reason General Weston distrusts novas so much is that he is fundamentally afraid of them. While he fought in combat on numerous occasions, superhuman beings with vast and often unknown capabilities scare him more than any battle he has even been in.

Gabriel's Bodyguards

Background: Fearful of being recaptured by Project Proteus, Gabriel is usually accompanied by a small group of bodyguards. All of them are extremely loyal. Constant close contact with Gabriel has rendered them all extremely susceptible to his powers of mental control. They will all willingly fight and die for him and will not stop fighting until they are incapacitated or killed. Gabriel has recruited both men and women as bodyguards and has used his powers of Biomanipulation to dramatically enhance all of their physical attributes. Gabriel will use his powers to give all of them a Mega-Strength of one (with no enhancements) at the beginning of any fight. The Storyteller should adjust the number of bodyguards to reflect the number of characters.

Description: The men and the women both wear conservative suits. The men all have short hair, and the women all have shoulder length hair. They are all large, impressive looking and rather unemotional.

Roleplaying Hints: You care for nothing but Gabriel. Protecting your Savior's well being is worth any price. You know that if you are killed serving him you will be welcomed into the kingdom of Heaven.

Gear: Flechette rifle, knife

Nature: Follower

Allegiance: Gabriel Melchior

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 2, Charisma 2

Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Drive 2,

Endurance 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 2, Interrogation 2, Intrusion 2, Melee 2, Medicine 1, Might 2, Resistance 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Survival 2
Backgrounds: Backing 3, Resources 2
 Willpower 3 (with +2 resistance to all forms of mental control)

Gabriel Melchior



Background: Gabriel grew up passionately religious and with a deep conviction that God had some special plan for his life. For him, N-Day was clear evidence that God was taking a more active roll in the world. He joined the CIE in 1999 and immediately knew that he had finally found the path God wished him to walk. This feeling was confirmed five years later when he erupted.

Since that time, Gabriel has known that he was destined to lead God's armies on Earth in the final battle against Satan. He viewed his captivity by Project Proteus as either a test or a punishment for some unknown failure. While he never doubted God's grace, this captivity terrified him, and he is determined to never allow it to happen again. Currently, Gabriel is terrified of being recaptured, but is unwilling to admit his fear to himself or to anyone else.

Description: Gabriel dresses in starkly impressive white robes and moves with grace and confidence. His voice is loud and imposing.

Roleplaying Hints: You hate Project Utopia with a passionate intensity and will attempt to convince anyone who belongs to it to renounce the evil they serve. Your followers are deeply important to you, but your higher purpose makes even them irrelevant. The life and death of a few, or even a few million are no longer important to you, as long as God's plan is served. You know that the last days are at hand and that God will be calling all good people into Heaven quite soon.

Nature: Visionary

Allegiance: CIE

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Appearance 5, Manipulation 3, Charisma 4

Abilities: Athletics 2, Drive 2, Martial Arts 2, Endurance 4, Resistance 4, Awareness 2, Academics 1, Bureaucracy 2, Linguistics 1 (Romance), Medicine 1, Survival 2, Biz 2, Style 4, Subterfuge 2, Etiquette 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Followers 5, Influence 3, Node 5, Resources 4

Quantum 7, Quantum Pool 34, Willpower 5, Taint 8 (Contagious [Various Minor Diseases], Delusions [Messiah Complex], Energy Emission, Megalomania, Unearthly Beauty)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina ••• (Adaptability, Resiliency), Mega-Wits • (Natural Empath), Mega-Manipulation ••• (Persuader), Mega-Charisma ••• (Commanding Presence, Natural Agitator)

Quantum Powers: Biomanipulation ••••• (All Techniques, Affect Microbes), ESP •, Psychic Shield ••

Other Novas

The following group is designed to be used as either the Teragen Liberation Team, or the Project Proteus Hit Squad, depending upon the Storyteller's wishes and the allegiance of the characters. Little detail will be given on these characters, other than their powers and their basic personality. Storytellers should decide upon the rest depending upon the roll these characters will play. Refer to the setting section for information on the attitudes of the Teragen and Project Proteus toward the events in this scenario. If these opponents seem too powerful for the characters to defeat, remove Leo, and only use Blackout and Heavy.

Blackout



Background: Blackout, whose real name is known by a select few, is the leader of the team and the only member who is passionately loyal to her organization. She was once a somewhat jaded intelligence operative who saw her eruption as a chance to work for a cause she truly believed in.

Description: Blackout is a tall, raw-boned, blonde woman who is normally dressed in a long trench coat over fatigues. When in combat, she is covered with roiling black energy, which she uses to protect her and strike her enemies.

Roleplaying Hints: You have seen a great deal of violence and death and wish to avoid more if at all possible. You will ask the characters to surrender and will attempt to convince them of the rightness of your position before you attack. However, once you attack, you are a fierce and dedicated warrior who will only surrender if the situation becomes completely hopeless. Your first goal is to complete your mission, and your second goal is to protect your team.

Gear: SMG, Small, 2x white phosphorus grenades, VTP dart gun

Nature: Leader

Allegiance: Teragen or Proteus (see above)

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 3,

Wits 4, Appearance 2, Manipulation 2, Charisma 3

Abilities: Academics 1, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Command 2, Computer 3, Drive 2, Endurance 3, Engineering 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 1, Intrusion 3, Investigation 2, Martial Arts 3, Medicine 1, Pilot 2, Resistance 3, Science 1, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Backing 3, Dormancy 3, Cipher 5, Node 2, Resources 4

Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 7, Taint 2

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity •• (Accuracy, Physical Prodigy, Rapid Strike), Mega-Perception • (Electromagnetic Vision), Mega-Intelligence • (Analyze Weakness), Mega-Wits •• (Quickness x2)

Quantum Powers: Claws •••, Force Field ••, Teleport •• (Combat Teleport)

Heavy

Background: Heavy, whose real name is George Tanaka, is a large Japanese man in his early 30s. Shortly before his eruption, he was banned from sumo wrestling for excessive violence. He enjoys being a nova because he is powerful and he can more easily intimidate people.

Description: Heavy is 1.7 meters tall and weighs a bit over 100 kg. He is dressed in a full-length black jumpsuit and tall leather boots.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a violent person and enjoy hurting people. You know your team members do not like or approve of your violence, so you restrain these tendencies when they are watching. If you ever lose control of a situation and are in danger of being defeated, you are bound by your honor to stay until your comrades have escaped.



Gear: Pistol, Hvy., VTP dart gun

Nature: Bravo

Allegiance: Teragen or Proteus (see above)

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Appearance 2, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Academics 1, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Drive 2, Endurance 3, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Linguistics (Germanic) 1, Martial Arts 3, Medicine 2, Might 3, Resistance 3, Streetwise 2, Style 2, Subterfuge 2, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Backing 3, Cipher 3, Node 3, Resources 3

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 5, Taint 4 (Bulging Muscles)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength •• (Crush) Mega-Stamina •• (Adaptability, Hardbody), Mega-Perception • (Electromagnetic Vision)

Quantum Powers: Gravity Control ••• (Gravitational Field, Gravitic Flight, Gravitokinesis), Hypermovement (Flight) •

Leo

Background: Leo Washington is the newest member of the team. He is only 22 years old and was only allowed to join because of his considerable powers. He is rather inexperienced but has already proved his usefulness on several occasions. His main limitations are that he is a bit of a coward and he has little sense of tactics. He looks to Blackout for orders and is likely to panic if she is ever incapacitated.

Description: None of Leo's powers have any visible effects, so even in combat, he continues to appear to be a somewhat skinny black kid who looks like he is only about 17.

Roleplaying Hints: You have loads of fancy powers and love to be flashy. You look up to Blackout and have a



secret crush on her. You enjoy combat, but only when you are winning. It has never come up, but if you ever feel like you are losing, you are likely to turn and flee.

Gear: Pistol, Lt., flash grenade, tear gas grenade, VTP dart gun

Nature: Hedonist

Allegiance: Teragen or Proteus (see above)

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Appearance 3, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Academics 1, Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Computer 2, Drive 2, Endurance 3, Engineering 1, Firearms 1, Intimidation 1, Investigation 3, Legerdemain 3, Medicine 1, Resistance 3, Science 1, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1, Style 2, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Backing 3, Cipher 3, Dormancy 4, Resources 3

Quantum: 4, **Quantum Pool:** 28, **Willpower:** 3, **Taint:** 0

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Perception • (Quantum Attunement) Mega-Wits • (Multi-tasking, Synergy)

Quantum Powers: Absorption (Kinetic) ••, Entropy Control ••• (Bioentropy Storm, Entropic Shield, Probability Corruption), Healing ••, Intuition ••, Luck ••

Powers

Biomanipulation

Level: 3

Quantum Minimum: 6

Dice Pool: Variable

Range: Special

Area: Special

Duration: Variable

Effect: Character can control and manipulate all basic biological processes

Multiple Actions: Yes

Description: This rare and potent power gives a nova control over the very forces of life itself. Novas with this power can cure or kill with a touch and can even create new species or cause a seed to grow into a large tree in a manner of moments. The only limit on this power is that it can only be used to affect plants, animals and fungi. Without taking the Affect Microbes Extra, it cannot be used to affect viruses, bacteria or any other forms of microscopic life. As with Elemental Anima and Mastery, this power provides several techniques. A nova may learn and freely use one technique per dot in the power; she may attempt other techniques, but the player must pay double the quantum cost and roll against a difficulty penalty of one to activate these powers. Techniques include:

Body Manipulation

Dice Pool: Stamina + Biomanipulation

Range: (Quantum + power rating) x 5 meters

Area: N/A

Duration: Special

This ability allows the nova to control the physiology of a single living target. This ability can mimic the affect of any drug, from alcohol to soma, as well as the affects of any disease or poison. When used to imitate diseases or poisons, this ability is identical to the Poison power (Aberrant pp. 213-214). When this power is used against novas, it is a resisted action against the target's Willpower. This ability merely mimics the affects of various diseases and does not create actual diseases.

This same ability can also alter a target's fertility, causing a flower to release a large cloud of exceptionally fertile pollen or making a human (or nova) sterile or exceptionally fertile. The Teragen uses this last power to help novas override the sterility induced by Project Utopia.

The affects of this power normally last as long as a normal dose of a similar drug would last. However, the affects of poisons and diseases are instant, and the affects of altering a target's fertility generally last for several days. The degree of effect from this power depends upon the number of successes rolled:

Successes	Effects Produced
One	Sneezing Fits, Depressants, Instant Sun Tan
Two	Orgasms, Tear Gas, Amphetamines, Sterility or Radically Increased Fertility, Tiredness, Insomnia
Three	Mite, Mox, Adrenocelin, Hallucinogens, Seizures, Mania or Depression
Four	Red 7, Narcolepsy, Paranoia, Schizophrenia
Five	Nerve Gas, Soma, Heart Attacks

Form Manipulation

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Biomanipulation

Range: Touch

Area: N/A

Duration: Instant

This ability allows the nova to alter the shape of other living targets. The number of successes on a Manipulation + Biomanipulation roll determines the level of changes which can be made on a target. Targets may resist these changes with a Stamina + Resistance roll. This ability cannot be used to affect novas, including the user, and it cannot be used to give a baseline target nova Mega-Attributes. The affects of this power are normally permanent

Successes

Changes

One

Superficial changes: Give the target any Appearance from 0 to 5, change skin color, facial structure or similar features, change the target's apparent race, fingerprints or retina prints. Make a target look like an exact copy of anyone else with a similar weight, height and build.

Two

Minor changes: Alter the target's height or build, change the target's muscle to fat ratio. Move dots around between the target's Physical Attributes. Change a target's apparent gender. Disguise anyone as anyone else of approximately the

Three

Moderate changes: Change the target's physical gender, alter the target's mass by up to a factor of two. Give the target superficial features belonging to other species (give a human a tail or claws). Change any of a target's Physical Attributes from 1-5.

Four

Major changes: Give the target functional organs and abilities from other species (give a human functional wings, gills or tentacles). Change a target's mass by up to a factor of four.

Five

Extreme changes: Completely change a target's physical form, create new creatures by mixing traits from several other creatures. Change a target's mass by up to a factor of 10 (turn a human into a dog, sculpt muscle, flesh and bone like clay).

Growth

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Biomanipulation

Range: (Quantum + power rating) x 10 meters

Area: N/A or (Quantum + power rating) x 5 meter radius

Duration: Instant

This ability causes a living target to grow to its adult size in an exceptionally short time. For each success the

nova achieves on a Manipulation + Biomanipulation roll, the nova may add up to three years to the growth of any target. This ability has no effect on targets that have already attained their full adult size, and it can only be used to transform living things into their full adult size. This power automatically stops working when the target is fully mature, targets cannot be made artificially old or decrepit using this ability. Targets with short lifespans like mice or flowers require only a single success to become fully mature.

Human or animal targets may resist this effect with a Stamina roll. This ability can be used to affect any fungi, plant or animal from a colony of mold to a human being or a tree. While this ability can only be used to affect a single large target like a horse, a human or a tree, it can also be used to affect a large number of small simple entities like a hive of bees, a field of corn or a large patch of mildew. All targets of this power grow by absorbing nutrients from their environment at an incredible rate. Any use of this power will radically decrease local soil nutrients. Also, in addition to causing a corn field to grow from stubble to 3 meters in an instant, a corpse could be consumed by a horde of growing maggots in a few seconds or a wooden door could literally be devoured by mildew and fungi as the nova watches.

Health Manipulation

Dice Pool: Stamina + Biomanipulation

Range: (Quantum + power rating) x 5 meters

Area: N/A

Duration: Instant

This power allows the nova to heal or harm herself or others. Every success on a Stamina + Biomanipulation roll allow the nova to heal one bashing or lethal health level. The nova must spend one quantum point per health level to be healed. This power may only be employed once per target per scene. This same power can also be used to heal aggravated damage. Healing aggravated damage requires that the nova spend 10 Quantum points per health level healed. The character can only heal aggravated damage on a character once per day. This same power can also be used to negatively affect the health of a target by disrupting the cellular structure of the target's body. This attack does [Quantum x 2] levels + (power rating x 4) dice of bashing damage or [Quantum x 2] levels + (power rating x 3) dice of lethal damage (nova's choice). Only living targets can be damaged by this attack.

Extras: Affect Microbes (the character may also use this power to affect Viruses and Bacteria. This power cannot normally be used to harm novas since they are immune to most normal diseases. However, it can be used to cause colonies of bacteria to grow at an incredible rate or to create new and exceptionally deadly diseases which can be designed to infect anything from humans to crop plants.

Technology

The Spatial Stress Indicator (SSI): This device was

developed by Project Utopia two months ago. It is designed to detect and localize spatial distortions. It can detect and pinpoint any use of Teleport or Warp within five kilometers. While this device cannot determine to destination of the Teleport or Warp (unless the destination is also in range), it can pinpoint the location of such distortions within five minutes after they occur. The delay is caused by the device's need to process and analyze the data gather by its sensors. When in use, it will instantly indicate when a Warp or Teleport has occurred, as well as providing its approximate direction. Information on the exact location is then displayed five minutes later. The device is a cube approximately half a meter on a side. Currently, the existence of this device is a carefully guarded secret known only to a few Project Utopia and Project Proteus members. Mass: 100, Cost: (Restricted)

VTP Dart Gun: The latest secret creation of the Triton Foundation's pharmaceutical labs, Virally Tailored Poisons are complex enzymes which are created using a specific individual's DNA. Creating a

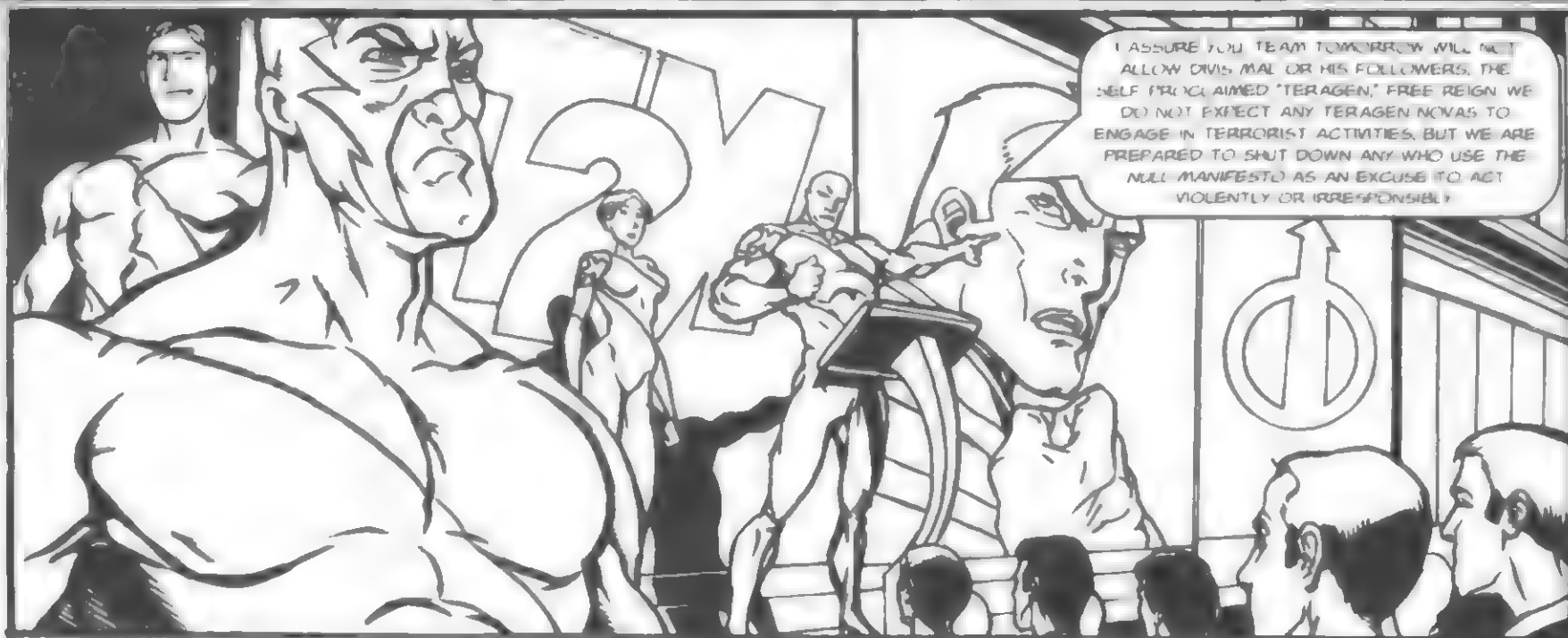


VTP requires several days, an advanced genetics lab and a sample of the target's DNA. Currently, only a few Triton Foundation researchers know the secret of creating VTPs. VTPs are designed to rapidly knock out even the most powerful novas. To affect the target, the VTP must directly contact their skin, so novas who use Force Field, Immolate, sealed suits or similar protections are largely immune to this type of attack. VTPs generally require between five and 15 turns to affect a target. However, they also work in an exceedingly subtle fashion. If the target is busy or is unaware that he has been attacked, he may fall unconscious without knowing there is anything wrong. (In this scenario, assume that the VTP requires seven turns to take effect.) After this time, targets hit with a VTP dart are unconscious and temporarily drained of all Quantum. Targets normally regain consciousness and fully recover within 12 hours, but during this time, even the most powerful nova can be slain easily.

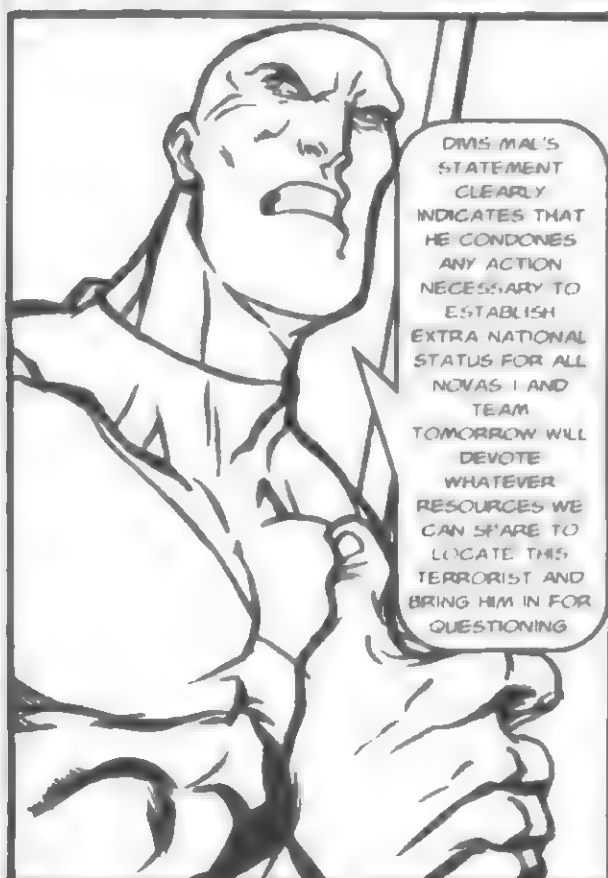
VTPs are most often delivered using a small pistol that fires darts composed of a special dissolving gel that causes the drug to soak through the victim's skin. Getting a solid hit on the target's bare skin normally requires a successful Firearms roll at +1 difficulty. Once the dart hits, no damage is rolled; the special enzymes affect the target unless some power like Healing or Biomanipulation (Body Manipulation) is used to reverse its affects (neutralizing a VTP requires a successful roll against either power at +4 difficulty).

Accuracy: 0, Damage: Special, Range: 20 Mnv: Tw, Rof 2, Clip 4, Conc: P, Mass: 0.5 Cost ••••• (Restricted)

CHAPTER 4: INTO THE ARMS OF THE ANGEL OF WRATH



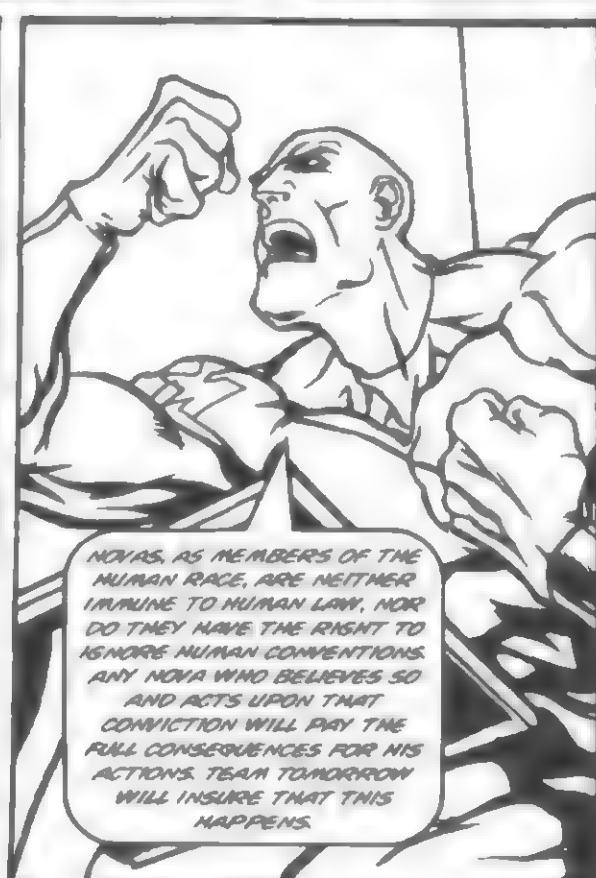
I ASSURE YOU TEAM TOMORROW WILL NOT ALLOW DIVIS MAL OR HIS FOLLOWERS, THE SELF PROCLAIMED "TERAGEN," FREE REIGN. WE DO NOT EXPECT ANY TERAGEN NOVAS TO ENGAGE IN TERRORIST ACTIVITIES, BUT WE ARE PREPARED TO SHUT DOWN ANY WHO USE THE NULL MANIFESTO AS AN EXCUSE TO ACT VIOLENTLY OR IRRESPONSIBLY.



DIVIS MAL'S STATEMENT CLEARLY INDICATES THAT HE CONDOLES ANY ACTION NECESSARY TO ESTABLISH EXTRA NATIONAL STATUS FOR ALL NOVAS. I AND TEAM TOMORROW WILL DEVOTE WHATEVER RESOURCES WE CAN SPARE TO LOCATE THIS TERRORIST AND BRING HIM IN FOR QUESTIONING.



DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENT REGARDING DIVIS MAL'S ALLEGATION THAT THE ZURICH ACCORD AND PROJECT UTOPIA EXIST SOLELY TO EXPLOIT NOVAS TO FEED HUMAN CONSUMERISM AND DEFUSE ANY OPPORTUNITY NOVAS MAY HAVE TO DEVISE A SOCIAL CONTRACT STRICTLY THEIR OWN?



NOVAS, AS MEMBERS OF THE HUMAN RACE, ARE NEITHER IMMUNE TO HUMAN LAW, NOR DO THEY HAVE THE RIGHT TO IGNORE HUMAN CONVENTIONS. ANY NOVA WHO BELIEVES SO AND ACTS UPON THAT CONVICTION WILL PAY THE FULL CONSEQUENCES FOR HIS ACTIONS. TEAM TOMORROW WILL INSURE THAT THIS HAPPENS.



WE CANNOT AFFORD TO ALLOW THE NULL MANIFESTO TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN NOVAS AND BASELINES. BASELINE SOCIAL CONTRACTS ARE NOVA SOCIAL CONTRACTS. WE DO NOT NEED OUR OWN LAWS TO GOVERN OUR BEHAVIOR, AND WE CERTAINLY CANNOT ALLOW ALL NOVAS TO ACT ONLY ON THE DICTATES OF THEIR CONSCIENCES.



ARE YOU PREPARED TO LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE NOVAS - REGARDLESS OF MORALITY - ARE ALLOWED TO DO AS THEY PLEASE? WHERE ANY ACT TO STOP THEIR DEPREDATIONS IS AN ACT OF WAR UPON A SOVEREIGN NATION? THIS IS WHAT DIVIS MAL PREACHES, AND SO LONG AS I BREATHE, THESE ARE PRECISELY THE SORT OF ANTICS THAT I WILL NOT ALLOW!

Transcript

Transcript of recording of emergency UN Security Council Meeting, November 1, 2005

First Voice (upper-class English accent): What do you plan to do about this Divis Mal fellow? He espouses very dangerous ideas — ideas that may destroy everything you're building.

Second Voice (northeast United States accent): We've traced the transmission to the Azores and dispatched agents to the site. We expect results very soon. Divis Mal can't stay out of our sight for long.

Third Voice (light French accent): Do you have any information on this nova? Who he is, what he can do? Do you know where he's from? Your Rashoud facilities would surely have records on a great many novas, no?

Second Voice (slight hesitation): We have no information on Divis Mal at this time, no.

Fourth Voice (Chinese accent, clearly enunciated): How soon do you expect the situation to change? And what of those novas who have already announced support for *The Null Manifesto*? Will you do anything about them?

Second Voice: We expect to track Divis Mal down within a few months. Only 3400 novas are known worldwide. This is not a large demographic. We've begun surveillance on the known Teragen and expect they will lead us to Divis Mal if no other avenue bears fruit.

Fifth Voice (Female, southeastern United States accent): Keep us updated on this matter. We can't afford to allow the Teragen significant influence. The thought of all novas declaring independence from world governments is a nightmare we might not survive.

Second Voice: As soon as I know anything, I will pass it along.

Could "Second Voice" above be Director Thetis?

E-mail

Date: 06/09/07 15:33 GMT

From: r.orzaiz@eurotrash.net

To: <recipient field blocked>

I understand your feelings on the matter, and I share them. However, your actions only serve to make us look worse. Now I have to play cleanup for your mess. I can't even walk to my car without a half-dozen reporters asking me for a statement about this.

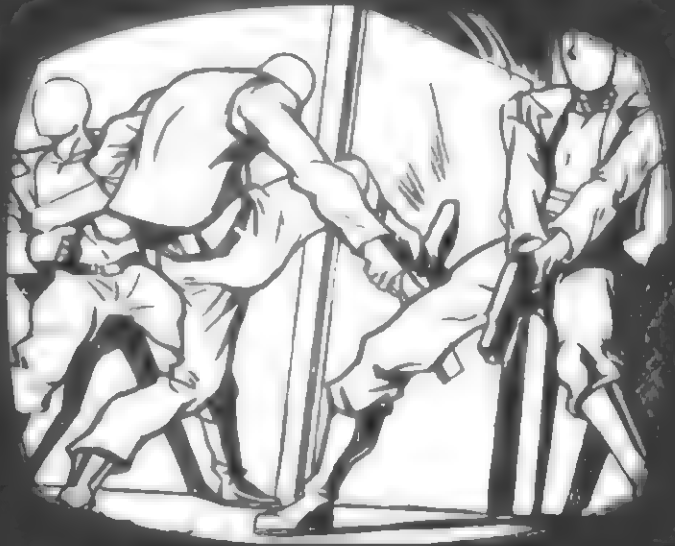
Next time you decide to play vigilante, bring it to the rest of the Pantheon, so we can make it look good

THERE YOU ARE: THE NIGHT SLIDER DIED

ANNOUNCER: TONIGHT, MAY 15, 2008, WE LOOK AT A CONTROVERSIAL MURDER THAT HAS NOVAS AND FANS WORLDWIDE UP IN ARMS. THE TEAM TOMORROW SWEETHEART, SLIDER, MET A TRAGIC END WITHIN HER APARTMENT ON MAY 13TH. TONIGHT, WE SHOW THE TRUTH, AND THERE YOU ARE, DRAMATIC RE-ENACTMENT.



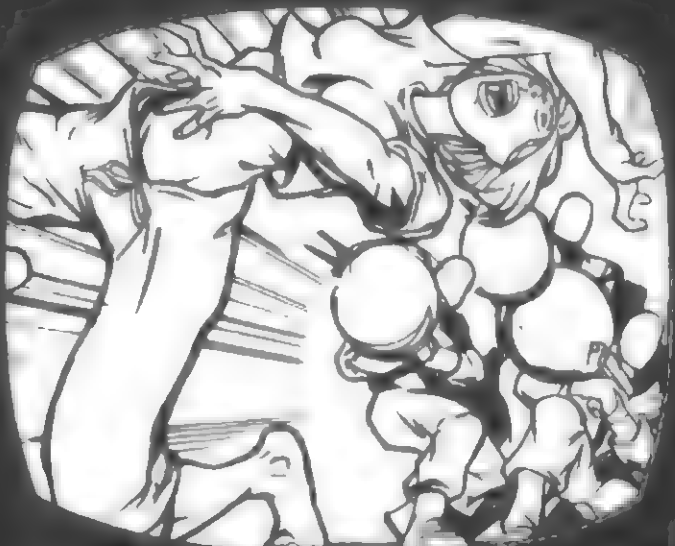
JENNIFER LANDERS, A WELL-LOVED TEAM TOMORROW MEMBER, WAS PREPARING FOR HER NIGHT'S SLEEP. SHE HAD NO REASON TO SUSPECT THAT ONLY MINUTES AWAY, TERRORIST TERAGEN MEMBERS WERE PREPARING TO BREAK IN AND SILENCE HER.



WHY DID THEY WANT TO SILENCE HER? WHAT DID SHE KNOW? WE DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER, YET.



SLIDER: WHAT DO YOU WANT? I HAVEN'T—



SHADOWY FIGURE #1 (DEEP VOICE): SEARCH EVERYTHING.

ANNOUNCER: WHAT WERE THEY LOOKING FOR? AGAIN, WE DO NOT KNOW. WE KNOW WHO MIGHT HAVE DONE IT.

ANDRE CORBIN: HE'D SPOKEN TO HER ONLY DAYS BEFORE AND FLED THE SCENE OF HER FUNERAL. WAS HE A TERAGEN [SPY] PLANTED WITHIN TEAM TOMORROW? DID SLIDER DISCOVER THE TRUTH?

NOLAN CRAMER: HIS OUTRE LOOKS SEEM TO RULE HIM OUT. SUSPICION LIES HERE BECAUSE HE IS CORBIN'S ONLY ALIBI.

IBRAHIM FAROUK: FAROUK WAS IN CALCUTTA THE NIGHT OF THE MURDER AND HAS NO ALIBI FOR THE TIME OF SLIDER'S

DEATH. COULD SLIDER'S MYSTERIOUS ENEMIES HAVE HIRED HIM? WHO KNOWS WHAT KIND OF SHADY CONTRACTS AN

ELITE MIGHT TAKE TO MAINTAIN HIS EXPENSIVE LIFESTYLE?

IF ANY OF OUR VIEWERS HAVE INFORMATION OR LEADS ABOUT SLIDER'S MURDER, PLEASE CONTACT US THROUGH OUR OPNET ADDRESS. ANYONE WHO PROVIDES INFORMATION THAT LEADS TO A CONVICTION ON THIS CASE WILL RECEIVE A HANDSOME REWARD FROM TEAM TOMORROW AND PROJECT UTOPIA. AFTER THESE MESSAGES, WE REVISIT THE CASE OF THE TELEPORTING BURGLAR. STAY TUNED.

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From "The World's
Opinion" segment,
dated 05/25/08

Who killed Slider and Why?

- Edward Mathis, Church of Michael Archangel Disciple, Texas: "As far as I'm concerned, the more novas who kill each other off, the better. It's better than letting them strut around and invalidate all human accomplishment."



- Eloise Duncan, high school student, New York City: "I think André Corbin killed her because she knew about something he did, something really bad. I hope Team Tomorrow gives him what he deserves."



- Edmund Cross, steel worker, London: "I think those Teragen arseholes did it. I expect they'll start working on the rest of Team Tomorrow soon. I've got five quid says Caestus Pax will smear Divis Mal across the landscape."



- Tu Hsun Fu, OpNet programmer, Hong Kong: "There's a secret cabal inside Utopia who want to control society and technology. Slider knew the truth and was killed to protect the secret. I have an OpNet page about it...."



- Magdalena Salvador, columnist, Rio de Janeiro: "Someone's trying to destabilize Utopia and provoke open war with the Teragen. They hit Slider because she's more personable and popular than someone like Antaeus, hence more likely to cause an uproar."



JERUSALEM, July 28, 2009

Donald Zeleckis, a Jewish-American tourist, died yesterday stopping a nuclear missile launched at Syria. Zeleckis' heroic effort took the missile out of the atmosphere before it detonated. No signs of Zeleckis or his remains have been found.

In a press conference earlier today, Israeli officials denied authorizing the escalation to nuclear weapons and claimed that nova extremists somehow arranged for the launch. Utopia liaison to Israel, Abraham Schlitt has promised full Utopia support in the investigation. Elements of T2M-Eu have been assigned to assist.

Syrian officials stated that they do not at this time believe Israel is responsible for the nuclear launch and will not respond in kind.

The Israeli government has announced that a memorial for Zeleckis will be held on July 31st. He will receive full posthumous honors for heroism. Both Syrian and Israeli governments have agreed to a cease-fire on that day to honor Zeleckis' sacrifice.

Bahrain Rashoud Facility: Prison or Rehab?

by Magdalena Salvador

05/05/10

As many of you are aware, Utopia opened a special Rashoud clinic in Bahrain four years ago. September 6, 2004 to be precise. You don't know this thanks to Utopia, who somehow didn't prepare any statements on its opening. No news agency covered it. We've all seen the documentaries about it, but do they tell the entire truth?

The Bahrain facility, unique from all other Rashoud clinics, is not open to the public or the media. If you can get hold of any information at all, you'll find official Utopia statements (spin) that go on about how the facility exists to help novas who have "high quantum build-ups." Just what does that mean? We all know that novas appear just a bit unusual — some are a little too perfect, others show signs of physical mutation or glow in the dark. But none of these novas are considered to have a "high quantum buildup."

At this point, I mostly have rumors — a nova who's shed her skin like a snake, still alive and well, but with no skin. You can see her muscles, her organs, etc. How it's all held together, I have no idea. I think it's a side effect of the Mazarin-Rashoud node. Whatever it is, this "high quantum buildup" inflicts very strange side effects on novas. Why does Utopia hide novas like this from us? What do they intend to accomplish?

A year and a half ago, we all heard about the nova Gabriel Melchior and his "divine ascension." I don't know about you, but this commentator finds the idea of divine intervention with novas to be just a tad bit redundant, but who knew what really happened? Five months ago, Melchior reappeared. Utopia didn't want anyone to know about this, either, but I have an exclusive account.

Melchior returned to the Church of the Immanent Escheaton's compound and demonstrated powers unlike those seen before. He granted miracles to his flock and promised to herald in the apocalypse. He vanished shortly thereafter.

TOP SECRET

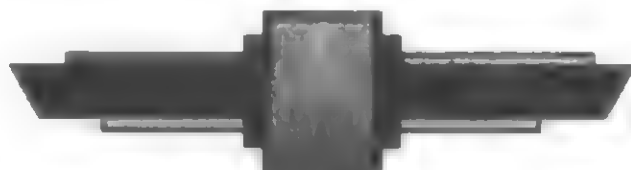
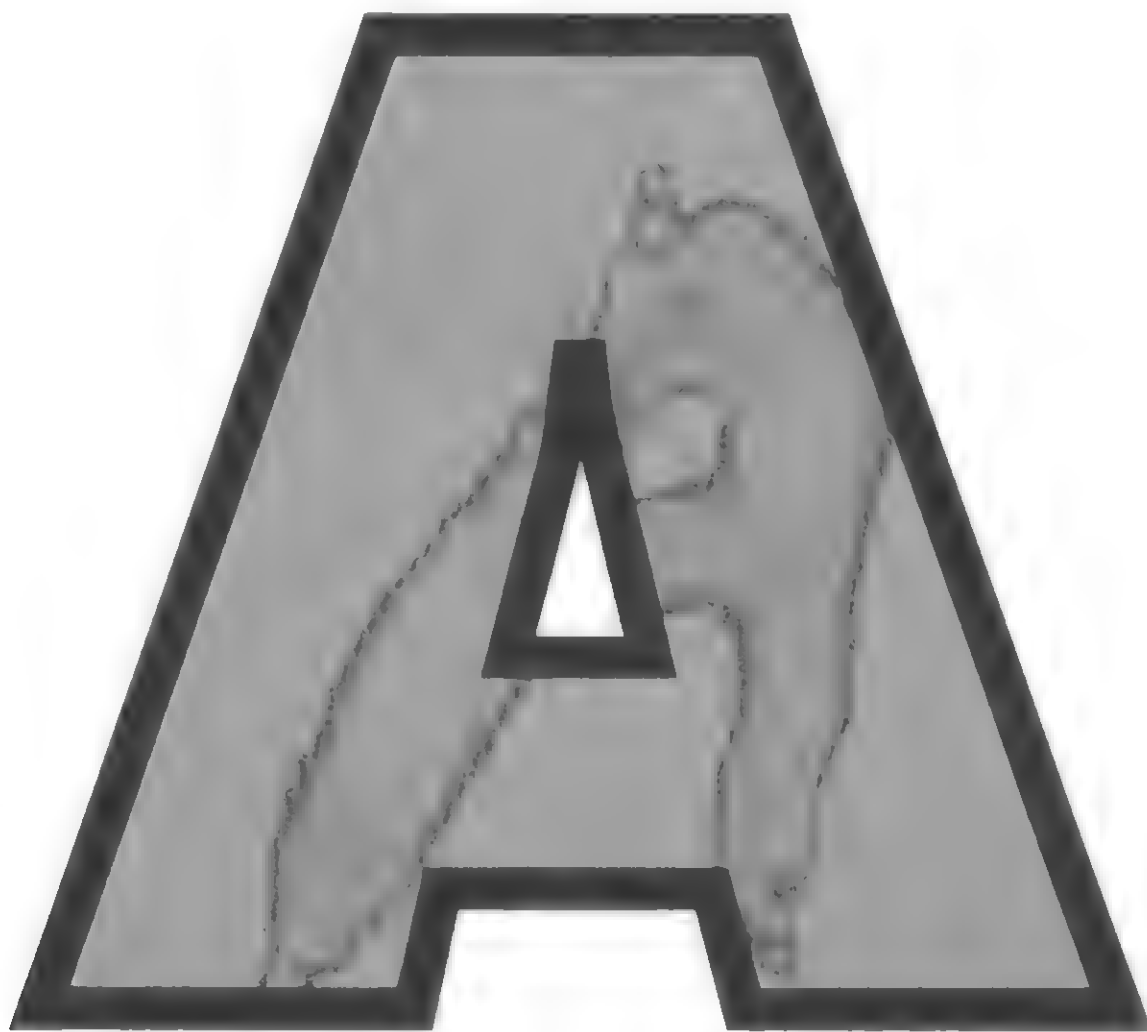
To: All Directors, Proteus

From: Director Thetis

Re: Bahrain Security

We cannot afford the lax state of our security. Melchior should not have escaped, and we'll make sure nothing like this happens again. Our first focus for upgrade is the Bahrain facility. I want to upgrade anti-intrusion and surveillance measures to a level that can stop anyone short of Caestus Pax. Whatever it takes — poisons engineered from nova physiology, railguns and laser emplacements. Whatever. It. Takes.

One more breach of this level and heads will roll. I'm sending our best security consultant to oversee the upgrades personally. I trust the funding will be available?



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Script excerpt from news special "Jennifer Landers, A Year of Mourning," set for May 14, 2009, never aired

It's been a full year since Team Tomorrow member Jennifer "Slider" Landers was murdered in her own home. Theories have flown fast and furious over who killed her and why. The initial suspects, the Teragen, seem much less likely than many thought last year. André Corbin's sudden departure from her funeral led many to speculate that perhaps he was the guilty party. If this is so, we have to ask the question: Why did he make an appearance at all? Mr. Corbin isn't telling, he's been in hiding, rumor has it, with some kind of subversive group of novas.

Interestingly, a flurry of accusations and rumors about Utopia's shadier activities flooded the OpNet shortly after Slider's death. It seems likely to us that this is no coincidence. But we wonder if these allegations have any truth to them.

Our first investigation took us to Calcutta, where we tried to discover which novas were present on the night of May 13th, 2008. We found that only one nova suspected of any Teragen affiliation was in Calcutta that night. On the other hand, we found no fewer than three novas affiliated with Utopia — all of whom Slider might have trusted enough to invite into her home, and all of whom were powerful enough to kill her with a single blow.

Now, this reporter isn't saying that Utopia is responsible for the murder, but circumstantial evidence suggests the possibility.

Still, not to leap to conclusions, we investigated the other stories about Utopia's "black operations." In nearly one-third of the cases, we could confirm that the details were accurate — to a point. The events did happen as described, but we have no evidence beyond the rumors that the novas involved are in any way connected to Project Utopia.

But what about Slider? Fans worldwide mourned her death, held candlelight vigils, and many congregations prayed for her soul. Her public loved her, she's greatly missed. Most of all, we want her murderer brought to justice.

Find!

Find!

N

TOP SECRET

Unmarked communiqué, dated 5/11/09

Jonathan,

Attached you'll find the script to an N! documentary about Slider, and it's not exactly friendly to the Project. We can't afford this kind of press right now. Get this thing edited or killed before it airs. Get anyone responsible fired if you have to.

DIRECTIVE FILE

Anderson,

I've enclosed all files on known Aberrant sympathizers. It's vitally important that we locate André Corbin before those ham-handed Utopia thugs get to him. I want to hear his version of the story before anyone has a chance to shut him up.

This whole Slider thing doesn't feel right. There's something else behind it, and I want to know — the Directive needs to know — what that is. If our suspicions are accurate, Utopia's up to something it shouldn't be. If we don't act soon, any containment procedures will be useless.

Whatever you do, don't cross paths with Utopia operatives. We can't afford an incident with them right now.

On a related note, see if you can find out anything about the rumors that the Teragen and Aberrants are getting together for something big. If they're working together, I think Utopia's blunders are the least of our worries.

Director Harris

Introduction

Into the Arms of the Angel of Wrath is the fourth part of **Aberrants: Worldwide**. It resolves the Slider murder mystery set up in the **Aberrant** setting chapter. The preceding setting pages are information for the Storyteller to give to the players, at her option.

Overview

When this episode opens, Project Utopia has already set plans in motion to improve their public image: They supported a nova for President

of the United States in the 2008 election (and may have lost). Utopia also began an ambitious project to terraform the Sahara into arable and productive land. Gabriel Melchior's escape, if it became public, is potentially a PR disaster of the worst order.

The situation at this point simply leaves one loose end for Utopia to tie up and move out of the public eye: Slider's murder. If Utopia can capture André Corbin and bring him to trial, it can finally shut the case. The Aberrants naturally want to learn who really did kill Slider and make it public knowledge. The Directive also wants to determine

who the real killer is, but at this point, it is as likely to suspect the Aberrants as anyone else. Proteus wants to clean the situation up, tie off any loose ends and protect itself from public revelation. The Teragen wants to bring Utopia down, rescue any high-Taint novas held captive in Proteus facilities and expose the Project for what the Teragen believe the organization truly is.

Based on previous events, it's increasingly clear to a large percentage of the nova population that Corbin is not guilty of Slider's murder.

The Aberrants intend to reveal the identity of the real murderer (as



soon as they know who, precisely, it is). They will join with the Teragen in an alliance to topple Utopia and expose the "truths"

about its operations and goals.

Corbin's in hiding, but needs someone to find out who the real killer is, which may lead to Aberrants doing some investigation in Calcutta. The Teragen begins attacking Utopia installations in search of captive novas. Proteus is put into a reactionary position, as it must keep anyone from finding out the truth about Slider's death, protect its facilities and apprehend any Aberrant or Teragen novas it can find. The Directive is curi-

ous about *everybody*, and any other novas could get involved for any of the above reasons.

Corbin decides to expose turn himself in (in the most public way possible — he's still an inveterate grandstander). This event, announced on N! two days in advance, should serve as a magnet for any novas interested in the outcome. Everyone converges on Bahrain to find out what's going to happen next or possibly influence the outcome. The Teragen sees this as a chance to get global coverage of Utopia's hidden activities and prepares to break into the Bahrain detention facility in response. Proteus sets a plan in motion to turn Aberrant and Teragen against each other (and get the heat off the Project), while simultaneously ridding itself of Corbin. Caestus Pax has his own agenda: He wants to use the circus to draw Divis Mal out of hiding (and get him out of the picture).

Any number of novas get involved when Proteus triggers the assassination attempt on Corbin, leading to a general melee with Quantum Bolts and other destructive effects flying all over the landscape. Divis Mal makes his appearance at this point, conclusively demonstrating to Caestus Pax just how pointless (and painful) standing against him really is.

Characters have the opportunity at this point to radically change the direction future events take. The end result could lead to Teragen-Aberrant conflict or full or partial public revelation of Proteus' shadier operations (which in turn would devastate Utopia's public image). Other possibilities include revealing Slider's true murderer or finding a patsy upon whom to lay the blame; either way, getting the question out of the public eye.

Whatever the result, novas do not trust Utopia as much as before. Many novas will keep a closer eye on just what Utopia's doing, at least for awhile, which may force Proteus to cut operations way back.

Theme

Into the Arms of the Angel of Wrath is about deception and truth. The Aberrants want to expose the real killer; Proteus wants to cover that up and frame Corbin. Utopia wants to shove the whole thing as far away as possible and restore their former public image. The Teragen shares the Aberrants' goal, but its members also want the shot at Utopia this event affords them and the opportunity to bring more into their faction.

Once this chapter is concluded, the murderer should be known — to the characters, if no one else. Keep in mind that layers of deception cover everything: Caestus Pax appears to be a paragon of nova-dom but is, in truth, little more than a

very powerful bully with a huge playground. Divis Mal appears to be a sinister villain but is truly an idealist (though not necessarily a *nice* idealist).

Mood

The primary mood is one of paranoia: Utopia and Team Tomorrow are concerned about what the Aberrants and the Teragen have planned next. Proteus is worried that some of its dirty secrets will come to light. The Aberrants have to be careful at every turn, fearing that any of the above might catch them and put a stop to their work before it's finished, and they are concerned that the Teragen will use their brief alliance to bring more trouble. The Teragen believes (correctly) that Utopia has imprisoned heavily tainted novas and keeps them captive for unethical (and often lethal) experimentation.

Play up the sense that there are others out there working against the characters' goals, no matter what they might be. Each faction faces opposition in getting what it wants here.

Freedom, not Rails

The plot given here is a possible direction, not the only one. You'll find constant references to "Utopia novas might do this," or "Proteus novas might do that." Characters being what they are (extensions of players, whom we all know exist to give Storytellers intense headaches) might go off on a completely different tangent. What happens if your Proteus novas discover the murderer and decide to go public? Run with it. *Aberrant* is less a game about factions than a game about personal power and freedom.

Let characters do what they must. Don't force them to adhere to the plot precisely as written. Use the plot as a guideline for what *could* happen. No battle plan survives contact with the enemy, and no storyline survives contact with the players. What battle plans and storylines do is provide a framework. Within that framework, you have laid out a beginning, a possible middle and an end. You know what you want to accomplish in the story. So what if the characters go off on some bizarre tangents? You can tie these tangents back into the story (awareness of the framework makes it easy to improvise on such matters) or just let them take the lead.

Unlike many other stories, the conclusion can play out in countless ways. How it plays out depends entirely upon your own plans and character actions. Run with it, it's your series.

The Setting

Into the Arms of the Angel of Wrath cuts across the globe, starting where Chapter Three left off, and picking up wherever the characters happen to choose. The various trails can lead characters literally anywhere. Two locations likely to feature prominently in this chapter are Calcutta

(where Slider lived and was murdered) and Bahrain (where Utopia's detainment facility for "rogue novas" is based).

Calcutta



Calcutta is the capital of West Bengal and the third largest city in India. In the wake of N-Day, it's become one of the wealthiest and cleanest cities. With help from the Triton Foundation and Project Utopia, Indian novas have done their best to improve their homeland. Calcutta shines brightly among the jewels.

Calcutta of 2009 is a bustling metropolis, a mixture of the modern, with skyscrapers, condominiums, apartment complexes and the ancient, with temples and the somber Marble Palace. Calcutta is also known as the "City of Palaces" and lives up to its name. Even with the new construction, the view from atop the Shahid Mahar is still breathtaking.

Calcutta has an extensive, efficient, clean and modern subway system, allowing quick travel to any part of the city (and neighboring cities). Taxis are also common, and most of the drivers even speak English.

Travel to Calcutta

Most international airlines have regular flights to and from Calcutta. Passengers can make connections from London, New York, Paris, Frankfurt, Moscow, Dubai, Bangkok, Singapore and other cities. Several major hotels (international and Indian) are available nearby.

Tourism

Calcutta welcomes tourists from all nations. The city thrives, in large part, upon such tourism (given the large number of monuments, palaces and other historical landmarks in the City of Palaces). Guided tours are available and include stops

at some of the more popular (and expensive) shopping districts.

Proteus Facilities

In the course of the story, characters may find themselves attacking, defending, raiding, breaking into or otherwise hanging around Proteus, Triton or Utopia facilities. Primarily, these would be clinics where high-Taint novas are kept in confinement (often sedated) for study and to keep them away from humanity. As such, they're high security zones, with full camera and motion sensor coverage, heavy-weapon emplacements and nova guardians. The latter is more likely to come up if one or more particularly dangerous novas are in confinement or if Teragen members have begun their raids.

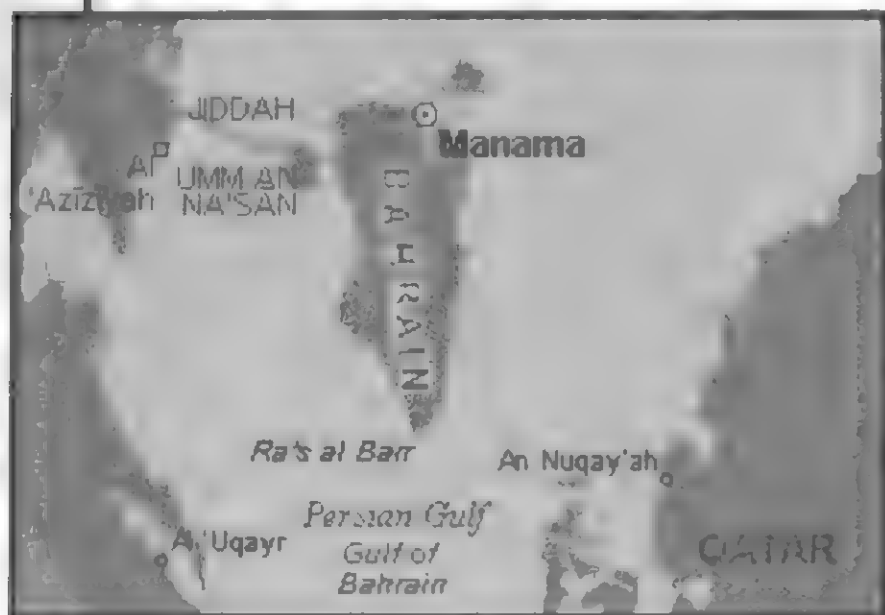
Each facility will have labs, quarters and a set of cells. Each cell will usually contain one heavily sedated nova strapped to a bed and pumped to the gills (possibly literally) with mox. Some may have had parts of their skulls removed and replaced with transparent plastic to make it possible to directly observe the M-R node. Play up the creepiness factor of these places. Note that the novas held here are usually quite insane, either from Taint, their treatment or both, and none are likely to react with gratitude if awakened.

When creating novas for these labs, use 35-40 nova points and an automatic 5-7 points of Taint. Seven points should be very rare, and eight is unheard of (with one exception, see Chapter Three). Aberrations will usually be dangerous to bystanders or the environment, either due to some kind of insanity (Hormonal Imbalance: Rage is appropriate) or because of physical side effects (the nova throws off sparks or constantly sweats a powerful acid).

To minimize collateral damage should any of their charges escape, these facilities are usually placed in isolated areas, with guard dogs, motion sensors, barbed wire fences, etc., set up a kilometer or two from the actual compound.

Novas in these facilities are dangerous to anyone around them. Proteus and Triton keep them locked away to better understand Taint processes and to protect humanity from these monsters. The methods may be questionable, but they believe they're acting in humanity's best interests. Utopia literally has no better way to deal with extremely twisted and insane novas who simply lack any self-control and would be a great danger to the world if allowed to roam free. Of course, the Teragen has its own opinions on the matter.

State of Bahrain



The State of Bahrain is an Arab nation just off the east coast of Saudi Arabia and north of Qatar. Bahrain has a thriving tourist industry (in addition to refining oil and smelting aluminum). In exchange for use of Bahrain territory, Utopia has provided financial assistance to develop Bahrain further and provided access to certain technologies not available to other nations. This isn't commonly known outside of Utopia's upper echelons and the Bahrain government.

Arabic is the official language in Bahrain but Farsi is in common use. English is commonly used for business transactions, which greatly improves the odds of finding someone who speaks a language the characters understand. Although Islam is the dominant religion, Bahrain protects religious freedom: Bahai, Christians, Jews, Hindus and Pharsees practice unmolested.

Note that British citizens and Utopia employees may enter Bahrain without a passport and stay for up to one month. Members of nearby Arab nations may enter freely and stay for as long as they like. Others need visas. Unless the government sponsors them, anyone who claims to be a journalist, writer or editor is likely to be refused entrance to the country. Women traveling unaccompanied by men, unless Utopia employees, are likely to encounter difficulty entering the country. Exceptions will be made in this particular story, although only in a few cases and with a great deal of cash and favors trading hands.

Once in Bahrain, transportation is limited to taxis, buses, rental cars and walking. The public transportation is quite modern and efficient — the better to herd tourists from shop to shop and attraction to attraction and suck the money out of their wallets.

The Bahrain Rashoud Facility

Set a few miles outside of Manama proper (Bahrain's capital), this Rashoud clinic has about

triple the standard precautions of the clinics described above. The most dangerous, tainted and antisocial novas are kept here under heavy guard. Any attempts to break in will be met with lethal force (if detected). Any character who reconnoiters the facility should clearly understand the degree of protection he's dealing with.

Since Melchior's escape, Proteus has consolidated the worst cases within Bahrain. In addition, Proteus has taken the opportunity to increase the defenses to keep the inmates inside and any attackers outside.

Key facility personnel are generating an anti-quantum field around the facility to inhibit unauthorized entry via Warp or Teleport. This field surrounds the entire building and another 10 meters or so beyond the outer walls and adds +3 to the difficulty for any novas to enter via either means.

Dr. Richard Toiho

Dr. Toiho is in the Bahrain facility during the events described in this chapter. At the first sign that trouble's headed to Bahrain, Montessor (see below and **Aberrant: Project Utopia**) will send him (and other "non-essential" staff) away.

If Dr. Toiho's still in the facility when the Teragen makes its raid, Terats may find him conducting medical experiments of dubious value (to them, anyway) upon high-Taint novas. Some novas (particularly Terats) may find it peculiar that some of his subjects have volunteered to participate. Still, they feel it's their only hope to regain a normal appearance and/or their sanity.

Montessor

The facility's head of security is a powerful nova and no fool. He believes that the drills and preparations executed by his team, combined with state-of-the-art weaponry, gives it a definite edge over all but the most powerful raiding parties. At the same time, he's a realist; he will not send his men to fight to the death against the Teragen Pantheon. He will, however, try to use clever tactics and planning to steer them away from sensitive and critical areas. He'll use the facility's security system to track movements and try to isolate individual Terats to take them one by one.

Montessor has also planted a few agents among the prisoners in expectation of the raid. These novas will use the opportunity to infiltrate the Teragen and learn what they can. Though he expects the Terats to emerge victorious, Montessor intends to fight enough of a holding action to convince them he's serious.

For the agents, create novas at a power level roughly equal to the characters, one for each character. Play them up with plausible stories and motivations (even on the surface).

Bahrain Security

Bahrain is probably the toughest nut to crack on the planet at this time. It's a prison intended to contain the most powerful and twisted examples of nova-dom under one roof. Security within includes tear gas potent enough to affect novas and guards with access to portable lasers. The facility is criss-crossed with hidden passages and sniper holes intended to allow the guards to get a tactical edge over attacking or escaping novas. Motion sensors and cameras track as much of the grounds as possible, some areas make use of extremely high voltages intended to incapacitate or even kill tough novas.

Bahrain security has access to devices that can be used to interfere with idiosyncratic nova powers — fire extinguishers are omnipresent, electromagnets may be present to interfere with use of Magnetic Control and so on. Note that Utopia has several nova geniuses working for it who develop technology for all purposes. Additionally, Utopia often "seizes" technology on its "forbidden" technology list. Any such devices could be used in Bahrain.

Running "Into the Arms of the Angel of Wrath"

Factions: Goals and Methods

The central element of this chapter deals with an issue nearly all novas have reason to worry about — the Slider murder. Each faction has its own reasons for concern, from keeping the truth concealed (Proteus) to exposing it for all to see (the Aberrants). Also note that individual novas can and will have personal agendas. A Utopia nova might find her loyalties swinging to the Aberrants upon learning the truth, or she might resolve that the murder was a mistake, but there were sound reasons for the death.

Don't try to force the players to go the route you prefer, give them as much leeway as possible when running this chapter. Aberrant is about the freedom to choose your own future. Novas — even those who work for an organization or align with a group like the Teragen — are independent agents. They don't have any overarching agendas or overwhelming allegiances that force them to think in any given way.

Run this for the individual novas in the group, with focus appropriate for each. Whatever their

reasons or motivations, you have sufficient hooks to spring on characters in this story.

The Aberrants

The Aberrants in general, and Corbin specifically, want to clear Corbin of all suspicion in Slider's murder and pinpoint the real culprit. As part of this goal, the Aberrants temporarily ally with the Teragen to expose the corruption within Utopia (and/or Proteus). Additionally, André Corbin has decided to expose himself to capture to draw the real murderer out of hiding (or bring out someone or something that will lead to the real murderer).

If the characters are Aberrants, they could meet with the Teragen to discuss the alliance, stand in as backup for Corbin when he turns himself in and do some investigative legwork to discover the real killer's identity. If the characters have played through the first three chapters, they should already have some clues to point them in the right direction. If they haven't played through the previous chapters, it's still possible to get the necessary information to them, either through a contact, a briefing or even through legwork in this chapter.

The Directive

The Directive, formed as a check to Utopia's power, is likely concerned about Utopia's involvement in Slider's death. Such an assassination clearly points to deeper mysteries the Directive's sponsors would like to uncover. On the surface, Utopia appears entirely beneficent to humanity. It doesn't follow that it'd need to kill one of its own to maintain any secrets.

As with the Aberrants, clues have been scattered throughout the previous three chapters. The Directive might not specifically look in the same places as other factions. Specifically, freelancers and Utopia top the Directive's list of suspects for the real murderer. It knows Corbin didn't kill. The Directive is probably aware at this point (given events in previous chapters) that some kind of "shadow agency" exists within Utopia, but it probably does not have much information beyond that. The events in this chapter will give Directive agents a clear, if fleeting, view into the world of Proteus.

Interaction with Teragen or Aberrant members could lead Directive agents to the proper perpetrator, if they talk before shooting.

Project Proteus

Proteus novas have a simple task — they need to cover up and/or destroy all evidence that could lead enemy agencies to discovering any of Proteus' secrets. In this chapter, the Aberrants, the Directive and others are actively trying to dis-

cover who really killed Slider. Proteus tries to keep all of them on the wrong track. Additionally, Proteus agents should attempt to draw as many Teragen and Aberrant members or sympathizers out into the open where Proteus or Team Tomorrow can apprehend them. Capture is preferable to death, given that many will have information of use to Proteus.

One possible twist would be that the characters — if they are Proteus operatives — killed Slider. If the Storyteller wants to go this route, clear it through the players first. It doesn't really matter if it wasn't established beforehand — as long as it's established before running *Aberrant: Worldwide*, there should be no conflict. At the very least, it will give the characters a more immediate and visceral reason to keep the lid on the situation. If the characters did kill Slider, it would be appropriate to run the killing as a flashback.

The Teragen

When the chapter begins, some of the Teragen (most likely the characters) will arrange a temporary alliance with the Aberrants. Certainly, Terats don't necessarily agree with the Aberrant viewpoint, but this will give them an opportunity to dig out a scandal and blow it wide open — hopefully crippling or destroying Utopia's credibility. Other issues include Gabriel, the high-Taint nova from Chapter Three whom Proteus had detained. The possibility that other novas might be imprisoned for the purposes of experimentation or simply to keep the "monsters" out of baseline view infuriates many of the Teragen to no end. Most wish to rescue their "brothers" from such illegal and demeaning custody.

Note the Aberrant information above. Thanks to the alliance, Teragen novas might assist in any or all Aberrant activities against Utopia or set out on their own. Either way, the Teragen has at least as much at stake as any other faction.

The Teragen presentation might encourage players or Storytellers to portray them as mindless thugs or super-villains with no discernible motive. Try to avoid this trap — Teragen-affiliated novas can be as idealistic as any member of Team Tomorrow, perhaps even more so. *The Null Manifesto* doctrine does not call for genocide, world domination or mass baseline enslavement. The manifesto proposes only that novas should only be subject to governance by other novas and not baselines.

Project Utopia

Novas in Utopia or Team Tomorrow have a vested interest in apprehending novas aligned with the Aberrant or Teragen factions. The latter are considered terrorists in direct opposition to Utopia.

Novas in this organization might be on the spot when Corbin tries to turn himself in and should be prepared to capture the murderer and deal with any traps set by his Aberrant allies. Utopia prefers to keep its novas occupied with such tasks to keep them from examining the Slider situation too closely.

Based on events in the first three chapters, Utopia novas might have suspicions about what really happened with Slider, or they might feel that Utopia acted to protect its own interests.

Independents

At this point, most novas on Earth should be interested in what really happened in the Slider murder. The allegations and rumors about Utopia's actions in the matter might lead even unaffiliated novas to try to discover the truth, contact Corbin (or Utopia) and work from there. Some might feel that Utopia needs their protection, while others might decide to blow the whole situation wide open.

Behind the Scenes

The Beginning

The Aberrants and the Teragen

At this point, it becomes clear to Aberrant and Teragen novas that their causes are similar enough that an alliance might be in order, at least until the situation can be cleared up. Many Terats want to free novas (like Gabriel from Chapter Three) who have been captured and held prisoner in Proteus facilities. The Aberrants want to finger Slider's murderer(s) and are certain that someone in Proteus is the culprit.

If characters are members of either (or both) of these factions, they might organize (or be invited to) a meeting to discuss the terms of such an alliance. The default goals for the Aberrants include finding the corrupt heart of Utopia and eliminating it. Many Aberrants see Utopia as a worthwhile agency with bad elements at the core. With those gone, Utopia can fulfill its stated goals without more conspiracy and murder.

Terats are more interested in bringing about Utopia's fall, either in the short or the long term. Slider's murder simply serves as a convenient starting point. They're also interested in any information about Utopia detention facilities the Aberrants may have and will bargain heavily for that information, in exchange for support and information in breaking open the Slider case.

Timeline

Into the Arms of the Angel of Wrath should cover the month of October 2010. Given that leeway, the pacing is entirely up to the Storyteller. The first events (the Aberrant-Teragen meeting) to the climactic finish (Divis Mal and Caestus Pax collide) can cover any period from a week to a few months. The following events cover major plot points and who might be involved in each

- **The Beginning:** Teragen and Aberrant novas meet to discuss an alliance and exchange information about Utopia and Proteus. Utopia novas are assigned to track down and apprehend André Corbin and any Aberrant and Teragen sympathizers they can find. Proteus novas are assigned to either cover up any and all evidence of the Slider murders still extant or to track down and eliminate André Corbin as a threat to security.

- **Legwork:** Terats locate and attack Proteus detention facilities in hopes of freeing "wrongfully imprisoned," high-Taint novas. Aberrants seek evidence leading to Slider's real killer. Utopia novas are delegated to protect facilities from Teragen attacks, to apprehend Aberrants nosing around in the wrong places and to capture Corbin. Proteus novas may have some of the same jobs as Utopia, but they will also try to conceal evidence leading to Slider's killer and likely have orders to eliminate Corbin.

- **Exposure:** After attempts to apprehend Corbin cause trouble for both Aberrant and Teragen novas, he resolves to turn himself in (and hopefully draw the real killers out of concealment) so that he may prove his innocence to the world. After the above, it's very possible that Aberrant investigators already know the identity of the real killer. Utopia novas are sent to bring Corbin to justice. Proteus novas are sent to assassinate Corbin (making it appear to be a Teragen attack).

- **Confrontation:** Utopia novas bring Corbin to the Bahrain detainment facility. Teragen novas, having attacked secondary facilities, now move on to the primary target. Proteus novas move in to execute Corbin, and the Aberrants are prepared to defend Corbin and aid the Teragen at a moment's notice. High-profile Team Tomorrow novas escort Corbin to incarceration, awaiting trial. Divis Mal appears to join the Teragen in their assault on the facility, and Caestus Pax joins Team Tomorrow in escorting Corbin. Pax seizes the opportunity to take out the Teragen leader and attacks. With the heavy hitters out of the way, the characters (whichever faction) are left to free novas from Bahrain or attack or defend Corbin, depending upon personal preference and allegiance — in that order.

- **Conclusion:** Pick up the pieces. Utopian characters may assist Bahrain personnel in rounding up fugitives, while Terats assist escapees. Utopian novas may also wish to help the defeated (and currently dormant) Caestus Pax with medical care and a speedy exit. Divis Mal and other Terats may take the opportunity to give recruitment speeches to any who might care to listen (or follow them home).

The setup works best if the meeting is arranged through known elements. If Count Orzaiz approaches the characters about an alliance, it will mean more — especially if one or more of the characters spent a few days or more gambling with the count and have prior connections. Try to tailor the contact (either way) to fit the group, so that it doesn't feel like a railroad. Of course, the characters may choose to ignore or refuse the invitation. The negotiations can happen anywhere in the world, literally. Good locales for the meeting include: The Amp Room (if one is very discreet), Monte Carlo, New York or Tokyo.

Storyteller characters should be good negotiators (Mega-Socials, etc.) but not overly obvious with influence. Since they might be the only members of their faction who want an alliance, their motivations for proposing (or accepting the proposal) should be tailored to each nova. Again, this works best if the novas are established characters from previous stories. Choose the cast with care because each nova is an important element in the **Aberrant** setting.

The end result could lead to a productive alliance, limited co-belligerent status or even a temporary or permanent severing of relations between the groups (depending upon how well behaved the characters are or how much they're willing to deal with the other side). For the Aberrants, this is almost literally a deal with the Devil. How do they know that this alliance won't lead to further — potentially damaging — association down the road? They could be tagged as Teragen sympathizers, which puts them higher on Proteus' hit list. Each faction's goal is only partially compatible with the other's, and this alone can lead to serious troubles in the near future, especially if agreement can't be reached (or someone reneges upon any particular element).

The negotiations should be tense. A meeting of four or more novas with such divergent philosophies could sit on the edge of a powder keg, ready to blow into a conflict at any moment. Both factions must exercise care to avoid igniting a conflict neither can afford.

Project Utopia

Novas in Utopia or Team Tomorrow have quite a few potential problems on their hands. André Corbin is still on the loose, Aberrant influence and disillusionment spread throughout the nova community, and Utopia's approval ratings are dropping too fast for comfort, thanks to the constantly multiplying rumors about Slider's assassination. A resolution must be reached soon if Utopia is ever going to recover the public trust it had prior to the murder.

Utopia's best bet is to step up apprehension of Aberrant and Teragen sympathizers. In truth, most of Utopia doesn't really make a distinction between the two factions (at least in public). Utopia novas might be sent undercover to join either faction and gain intelligence on their current activities (specifically to locate Corbin's whereabouts), or they might be given PR work to do, publicly showing Utopia's friendly side to the world, while others do the work necessary to stop the rumors.

Utopia moles in either the Aberrants or the Teragen might inform Utopia of the aforementioned negotiations. Utopia is naturally not interested in encouraging such cooperation, so it might use the opportunity to send a high profile mission to apprehend the "rogue" novas. Such moles may even be the characters. A mole must balance the reward of leaking the information with the risk of compromising his cover, of course. This action also serves as an opportunity to reveal whether or not the mole's been under surveillance.

Utopia needs to step up security on several of its facilities, given Gabriel's escape in Chapter Three. Characters might inspect the facilities (or guard one or more, depending upon mobility) for security leaks or other problems.

Project Proteus

Proteus intends to use the increasing controversy around Slider's murder to draw out and neutralize as many Teragen and Aberrant agents as possible. With just one critical leader, Proteus agents should be able to disassemble either group's structure (the Aberrants' cell structure makes this more difficult than it seems). Specific individuals on Proteus' list include André Corbin, Sophia Rousseau and Divis Mal.

Proteus has learned its lesson with the Slider assassination. It can't afford to kill any inconvenient novas in such circumstances again and passes directives to its agents for discretion and care in all operations. If it's possible to pin any action on rival factions, such as the Directive, or enemies, such as the Aberrants and the Teragen, supervisors strongly encourage it. Utopia cannot afford another PR nightmare until after the public's attention shifts to some other controversy.

The mole option given under Utopia above works just as well for Proteus, of course any attempt to neutralize the meeting will not be the PR

opportunity Utopia would seek. Rather, it would necessarily need to be quiet and hopefully lead both factions into believing the worst of the other.



The Directive

The Directive's leadership wants to know the truth about the Slider affair. Since the Directive was created as a counter to Utopia's pervasive influence, this particular matter is certainly of import to the agency. Directive agents could be moles within any other faction and track events from there. Others might be assigned to directly research the Slider case, recent Teragen activities, what really happened with The Miracle, etc.

The Directive could use the information gained for anything from fueling future investigations to destroying Utopia's credibility, depending upon the situation at the end of the chapter. Despite the shadowy reputation it holds, many of its agents would like justice to be done, and a good many do not care for Utopia's activities (policing technology, whitewashing novas' public images, concealing the less glamorous examples of nova-dom, etc).

Independents

At the point when Into the Arms of the Angel of Wrath begins, enough information has circulated that virtually every nova on Earth who isn't sequestered in the wilderness is probably curious about what Utopia's really up to, who killed Slider and why and what André Corbin is trying to do about it. Any individual or group might decide to work on finding the truth. After all, whoever killed Slider could decide that any other nova is a danger for similar reasons. It's best to find out why before the hammer falls.

Independents could seek out Corbin for his version of the story, investigate any involved faction (or individual novas therein) or track down those who had the power and opportunity to kill Slider and investigate *them*. Independents could also follow any of the leads described in the above sections on the other factions.

Naturally, any member of any faction can also choose to follow whichever path he prefers. Novas work for a great many agencies in 2009 but often have a great deal of leeway (as long as they don't become liabilities or security risks). A Proteus agent could very well decide that she can no longer condone Proteus' methods, whereas an Aberrant might decide that it's better not to harm Utopia in the long term. Encourage players to treat their characters as individuals, not as extensions of a given faction.

Legwork

The action begins here. Everyone has a starting point, but no one has enough pieces yet to put together a clear picture. It's likely that, at this

point, characters will scramble to discover what they feel they need to know (and pick up a few incidental pieces along the way). This section should be tense and careful. Everyone's stepping around a powder keg, and no one particularly wants to set it off just yet.

By the time this section is over, characters *might* know who killed Slider (or successfully conceal the same from discovery). Some of Proteus' secrets might be far closer to the open than its directors ever imagined possible. Finally, open war between Utopia and the Teragen might be on the verge of breaking out. Whatever happens, this portion of the story should end with the status quo shaken thoroughly.

The Aberrants

Aberrant sympathizers could choose to track down Slider's real killer — in this case, the trail would probably start in Calcutta, specifically in Slider's apartment or the morgue. Clues picked up in previous chapters could lead investigators to begin elsewhere. Individuals Aberrants might look up to question or investigate are listed in the following sidebar.

The precise handling of this investigation (where clues are, who knows what) is up to the Storyteller. We'd prefer that each Storyteller decide for himself who killed Slider.

The Teragen

With negotiations behind them, the Teragen begin moving against Proteus to free high-Taint novas from custody. This activity is necessarily one of high mobility, as these facilities could be located anywhere in the world. The plan is to drive Utopia paranoia up sufficiently that it spreads its forces out as thinly as possible. This also makes Aberrant investigations easier (if Utopia novas are trying to counteract Teragen activities, which they should, especially after the first raid). Note that any facility where Proteus keeps high-Taint novas under sedation isn't going to be easily found. The facility Gabriel escaped from is a good start and may hold the key to further investigation.

Other means would include legwork through Utopia or even public records of land ownership. Note that Proteus does not want these sites located and will have layers of deception concealing the true ownership, but a sufficiently clever character may find ways around such measures.

Each facility is likely to be heavily defended with both automatic security systems and potentially one or more novas. Ideally, it works best for Teragen to get inside quietly before making any noise or setting off any alarms.

Who Killed J.L.?

Jennifer Landers' cause of death leaves no doubt to the fact that another nova killed her; the questions are simply: Who did it? Who knows about it? Where are they now?

Proteus certainly executed Slider to silence her. This was an ill-advised, drastic course. The director who gave the order was literally in a panic over the possibility that Slider could reveal Proteus' existence to the world. Also, most of her allegations were true (though given a paranoid spin). Now, Proteus has to bury the truth so deep no one — nova or baseline — will ever be able to dig it up. Unfortunately, the Aberrants are working fast, and it will be difficult to hide everything before they make a clean sweep of the available evidence.

It's not inevitable that the Aberrants will discover the true killer's identity or the motives behind it. If the players are Proteus operatives, it should certainly be possible for them to keep Aberrant and other investigators from the truth. On the other hand, it should be possible for any novas who investigate the matter to learn the truth. Either outcome is not a given, but the question should be dealt with by *Into the Arms of the Angel of Wrath's* conclusion.

Following are the characters who have information about the crime:

- **Apoorva Chowdiah and Edgar Rhys:** Officially, they are the first two police officers to arrive at the murder scene. Neither are Calcutta beat police. Rather, both are police/UN liaisons. Unfortunately, neither is in Calcutta. Both were transferred elsewhere. Apoorva Chowdiah was officially transferred to Utopia's European headquarters, and Rhys has no official forwarding address. Of course, Chowdiah's official whereabouts may have little to do with the reality. Successfully tracking down either might require a mole inside Utopia or Proteus or possibly a quiet break in. Both officers' loyalties lie with Utopia, and they will not reveal anything more than the basic facts of the scene: Landers was found dead, with a pulverized spine, the sternum shattered through her body and her ribs splayed out. Anyone who saw the body could tell the cause of death was a solid punch from an extremely strong nova. They may possibly know more, but it will require nova-level influence to dig it out (Telepathy, Domination, social Mega-Attributes, etc) or very good roleplaying. Be flexible on this point — if the players are clever, reward them.

Apoorva Chowdiah is currently in Europe — in Paris, to be precise. Edgar Rhys has been transferred to New York City, into the United Nations' Utopia offices.

- **Prasan Mandavilli:** He is the Calcutta officer who did arrive first on the scene. He's still in Calcutta and still works in the precinct office, but he knows very little. He responded to a call from Slider's neighbors. They heard a single loud noise and called the police. Mandavilli found Landers dead, in the kitchen, with a broken neck and a hole punched through her torso. He knows nothing more but is curious to find out and may aid investigators if he trusts their motives. With more convincing, he might be inclined to direct the characters to Detective Kalsi.

- **Detective Thaananon Kalsi:** After Mandavilli called the situation into the station, Detective Kalsi was the first to respond (he was in the neighborhood). Kalsi has slightly more information than Mandavilli. At first, he's distrustful of any characters, suspecting that they might be assassins sent to silence him. He doesn't respect Chowdiah and Rhys's handling of the case and smells a cover-up. If the characters can find him (Antenna, another Aberrant, knows how to locate him or will simply pass along what he learned from Kalsi), they have to convince him to let down his guard. If they mention Antenna or Mandavilli, that might help. Forcing him through quantum powers to break down is much harder. Kalsi has an incredibly strong will (for a baseline). He has 12 dice to resist mental compulsion.

- **Slider's Neighbors:** None saw or heard anything other than the sound of Landers hitting the wall, a rather loud "crack." They do know Mandavilli was actually the first officer on the scene, which might help.

The following Storyteller characters are the most likely suspects for the killing. The Storyteller should decide who committed the actual deed.

- **Ibrahim Farouk, AKA "Radi Khanjar":** He's a heavy-duty elite, with a preference for the Middle East. While he's close-mouthed about his powers, it's known that he has great physical prowess, a form of psychic invisibility and a substantial resistance to injury. Farouk is the closest fit for a suspect and could easily be the assassin. However, this means he's also the most easily fingered as the assassin. It's possible that he did kill Slider, but it's equally possible Proteus "arranged" for his presence as a distraction from the real killer, whose presence in Calcutta was unknown.



Unfortunately for someone who wants an easy solution, Slider did not know Farouk and would be unlikely to allow him into her apartment at such a late hour. His powers allow him to conceal himself from sight, but do not allow him to disguise himself as someone else (at least, he isn't known to have this capability — it's entirely possible that he does. If he killed Slider, it's not too much of a stretch to assume this is the case).

If Ibrahim was hired to kill Slider, either Proteus could have hired him (through blinds) to lead others astray or someone other agency (DeVries, Novelty) to cause problems for Project Utopia in the short- and long-term.

Ibrahim Farouk is currently contracted to Israel, doing covert military work against their enemies. This should make it at least somewhat difficult to track him down.

- Della Weisskopf: She's a powerful psychic and could use her powers to gain access, but she simply does not have the physical strength to inflict such a devastating injury. This does not rule out the possibility of her compelling Slider from a distance while a more physical nova actually did the deed.

Violet Chao: She's a pacifist nova who works for Utopia, was in Calcutta the night of Slider's murder. She has an alibi, complete with eyewitnesses. Given Della Weisskopf's presence, this does not rule out the possibility that Violet struck the killing blow — guided by Della's will. For a psychic of Della's powers, taking control of Violet's mind long enough to kill Slider would not be impossible. Furthermore, it would not be much more difficult to alter her friends' memories so as to provide a reliable alibi. This leaves only the question of physical security at Chao's residence — which could have been altered.

- Chiraben: Chiraben is the most likely candidate — he's Proteus' number one triggerman. But, his overzealous attitude toward network has caused him a few problems recently. It's not known if he was in Calcutta the night of the murder, but he does possess the strength to kill Slider in one blow. Slider did not know him, but this is irrelevant when dealing with a shapeshifter. He could have taken the form of any of Slider's friends from T2M or Utopia (except Corbin, whom Slider knew was in Scotland at the time) and gotten in. It would have been simple enough for Chiraben to arrange transportation under a different face and identification to enter Calcutta and act from there.

Chiraben's history and character information can be found in the **Aberrant Storytellers Screen**.

The listed novas are possibilities. It's easy enough to add more to the list, remove some and switch things around. Whatever the final scenario is, decide upon it before running **Aberrant: Worldwide**, as that should shape certain events in each chapter. Proteus novas who don't realize until they reach *Into the Arms of the Angel of Wrath* that they killed Slider might not be very careful about covering up evidence in the first three chapters. Come up with something reasonable, but try not to be too clichéd about it.

Tailor the real story to fit your series and events within it. Don't feel bound to use only the options provided. If you have a nova who'd be perfect for the role of murderer already established in your series, use her instead. Some suggestions for alteration include:

- Proteus didn't kill Slider, someone else (the Directive, Novelty Consulting, Sophia Rousseau, etc) made the hit to frame Utopia or otherwise advance personal agendas.
- Slider wasn't supposed to die — the operative sent to talk to her was supposed to bring her peacefully back into the fold, but something went horribly wrong.
- Slider contacted a Proteus nova deliberately. She presented her findings thinking that he would be sympathetic to her observations. He panicked and killed her.
- Slider took the story to Caestus Pax, who tried to convince her she was making mountains out of molehills. They get into an argument, Pax tries to take her back to T2M-C headquarters, but she refuses. He loses his temper and kills her when she turns her back on him.
- This works if the player characters are with Proteus — they killed Slider. In order for this to succeed, you should work it out with the players in question in advance. No one likes to have secret background information like this dropped without warning.

The possibilities are endless, as long as they're presented in a plausible and interesting manner. Storytellers need not concern themselves with contradicting published material on this point, and players can't pick up the truth on a read-through.



Novas kept within these facilities are usually physically and/or mentally twisted beyond anything seen in public. Most have six or seven Taint. Gabriel is arguably the only nova who has eight permanent Taint, but one or two others (with less anti-social aberrations — relatively speaking — than Gabriel's personal plagues) might exist. Many have been subjected to painful experiments in attempts to remove or burn out the M-R node or otherwise interfere with the subjects' nova status. Most will be violent if freed from their restraints, and they are all kept under constant sedation. The high Taint evinced by these novas is typically indicative of high levels of power. Overly-idealistic characters will probably learn this the hard way.

Terats will get (at best) one or two raids before Utopia is prepared for immediate response to their attacks. A warper with perhaps one or two more novas than there are characters will arrive shortly after any alarms are triggered. These novas are definitely Proteus operatives and aware of the captive novas. At first, they will attempt to capture the Teragen attackers. If the Teragen respond with lethal force, Proteus novas will respond in kind. At some point, continued attacks may simply become suicidal.

Project Proteus

Proteus novas have several possible directions to go at this point. The Teragen is attacking Proteus facilities and needs to be stopped. The Aberrants are closing in on the real killer's identity (possibly the characters!). Proteus may even be aware of potential security leaks within its organization — moles.

Novas detailed to stop Teragen attacks should be combat capable but cool-headed enough that they remember to attempt capture unless the situation dictates otherwise. The team also requires nearly instant mobility. If one of the characters doesn't have Warp, a T2M member or Proteus nova with Warp assigned to the characters' group can provide the service. When responding to Teragen attacks, note the comments on the facilities above. The situation should be similar (one or two more Terats than there are characters) and could easily turn dangerous at any moment, especially if hotheads like Geryon are in on the raid.

Novas who set out to conceal the identity of Slider's assassin will likely be (at best) one or two steps ahead of the Aberrants. The characters also need to track down anyone who might know anything about the assassination and find a means to silence them, one way or another. Telepathy is ideal for this, but lethal force may be necessary. A more difficult aspect of the operation would

involve setting up a fall guy — select one of the novas who could do it and implant memories of committing the deed. From there, plant evidence to support the cover story and hopefully the Aberrants will be satisfied.

Directive agents might also investigate the matter, which makes the work doubly ticklish. Unlike the Aberrants, Directive novas are far more likely to be professional at this sort of thing and much less likely to be diverted with smoke and mirrors. Characters will have to work hard to avoid or misdirect Directive scrutiny (or perhaps simply eliminate the agents, if it could be pinned on the Aberrants).

With so many different problems coming to a head simultaneously, Proteus cannot afford security leaks. Proteus personnel never relax their guard, but at this time, they need to be extra careful. Doubled and repeated security checks will become the norm, and characters (if they have the right talents) may find themselves looking for treason within Proteus' ranks. This can be especially dangerous for characters who happen to be moles for the Aberrants or the Teragen. Since the watchmen need to be watched, they'll be the first checked for treason. A mole would have to be very careful not to reveal his true loyalties or simply try to escape before he's caught (or if he's caught, as the case may be).

It's possible for the characters to get involved in all of the above, depending upon the timing.

Project Utopia

Utopia novas will also have their hands full with the current situation. Some of the Teragen attacks may be picked up on camera. The film can be used to identify the powers and/or appearance of Teragen novas. That information is passed along to Project Utopia, so Team Tomorrow or others can track down and apprehend Teragen members as a high profile PR boost for Utopia. Proteus may also identify Aberrants investigating Slider's death and give Utopia pointers for them as well.

Novas could also protect Utopia installations from Teragen raids, as above, or perform security checks for moles within their own ranks.

André Corbin is on Utopia's most-wanted list. Team Tomorrow will be on the lookout for him at all times and may track him down. At the moment, he's in deep cover, where he's debating whether he wants to present himself for arrest (and hopefully draw out Slider's murderer) or continue as he is. If Team Tomorrow or any other trustworthy Utopia novas finds him, he will surrender to them immediately (modify the next section, Exposure, as appropriate). He's already uncomfort-

able with the fact that Aberrants are out turning over stones he should investigate on his own.

One important point to bear in mind here is that Utopia isn't aware of the real events surrounding Slider's death, and several Utopians knew Slider personally. If Utopian novas grab Aberrants who know the truth, the Aberrants might spill the beans. If the characters believe what the Aberrants have to say, one or more may have sufficient reason to switch sides (or pretend to switch sides, so as to infiltrate the Aberrants). Novas who were on good terms with Slider may have very good reason to jump ship.

The Directive

The Directive's current goals include attempts to track down and capture any known Teragen members, any known Aberrant members and Slider's murderer. If the Directive has come across evidence in previous chapters, they might have enough to draw the conclusion that Utopia or some kind of "shadow cabal" committed the murder.

Operatives who want to track down Aberrants certainly have the opportunity to do so if they're also looking for Slider's murderer. Characters may choose to apprehend the Aberrants or simply exchange information with them. The Aberrants won't mention any alliance with the Teragen, given that they think this would scare the socks off the Directive (or nearly any other faction, for that matter). They might be willing to share the truth about Slider's killer in exchange for other concessions (don't use this to destroy Utopia, but help us bring the killer to justice).

The Directive and Utopia have no real love lost between them, but the Teragen "terrorist" attacks on Utopia facilities are just the sort of thing that Directive novas hate to hear about. Utopia might be willing to share files on known Teragen members and ask the Directive for assistance in this crisis situation. Again, there's the risk that Directive novas will hear the reasons *why* the Teragen has attacked Utopia installations. Utopia will assure the Directive that Terats will attack with lethal force in conflict, but there's a good chance that the "terrorists" will act fairly reasonably, at least until attacked. This is not to say that Teragen novas will let their guard down, but they might take the opportunity to plant a few doubts about serving humanity in the Directive "lapdogs" minds.

Play this carefully, none of the players involved are stupid. Be careful not to simply give the information away (Why would the Aberrants or the Teragen trust Directive agents? There must be a reason), but make them work for it.

Independents

Independent novas are the wild cards. They can take any side and go off on any tangent, which might not occur to someone in one of the above factions. Indeed, any of the routes described above might be appropriate — Independents might go looking for Corbin or perhaps the Aberrants. Some might decide to uncover who really killed Slider or even execute a vendetta by proving a personal enemy did it (whether it's true or not). Based on previous events, some might polarize toward or away from any given faction.

Independents have no one to report to, but they also have no particular backing if things go wrong. This lack of infrastructure gives them greater freedom of movement and action, as their plans are less likely to be uncovered by a mole. Interactions with other factions take on a different tone, since any pre-existing baggage comes from reputations (as elites, novox singers or XWF shootfighters) as opposed to direct affiliations to any of the concerned agencies. An Aberrant who might not even try to sway a Proteus agent might take the time to bring an independent up to speed. This can also be a detriment, in that no particular faction will see an independent nova as an ally or even necessarily friendly.

The DeVries Agency (and other Elites)

It's very easy to bring elites into this story — have someone hire them to protect/capture/kill Corbin or some other high-profile nova involved at any point. This serves as a convenient means to bring otherwise unconnected novas together and gives them a reason to stay together until the end. Anyone could hire them (via the DeVries Agency) for any reason. This provides an opportunity to highlight other issues and players in the setting not otherwise mentioned.

Depending upon the assigned job, elites could face issues similar to those mentioned for any other faction but from a different perspective.

Exposure

Corbin decides to prove his innocence — by turning himself in for trial. He calls in contacts to arrange a press conference at a time and place of his choosing — Bahrain — also revealing the existence of Utopia's nova prison. From there, he, his Team Tomorrow escorts and the documentary producers Gaal and Najarian will be shipped directly to Bahrain, where Proteus intends to "deal with" André Corbin permanently.

Proteus intends to use this occasion to shatter the Aberrant-Teragen alliance before it firms up into something stronger and more threatening.

They intend to make Corbin's assassination look like a Teragen attack.

The Teragen use the opportunity afforded by Corbin's arrival in Bahrain to get maximum coverage of their raid on Bahrain (and to expose just what's happening to the prisoners live on N!). Additionally, at least a few Terats want to rescue personal friends who have been wrongfully imprisoned in the Bahrain facility simply for political affiliation. Mostly, they want the world to see just how Utopia's been lying to them.

Exposure is likely to end in a pitched battle, as two or more factions clash right in the Bahrain penitentiary's courtyard. Corbin's sacrifice (whether he survives Exposure or not) leads to the bloodiest nova conflict ever filmed. The legendary nova documentary team of Gaal and Najarian will be on the scene to film the conflict. They intend to record the whole thing and sell the footage to N! for a pile of money. How they manage to get into Bahrain is nothing short of incredible, given the national attitude toward foreign reporters. The truth is, if there's a way in, they'll find it.

The Aberrants

After spending a year in hiding, Corbin decides to draw things to a close. Thanks to previous events, he's probably aware of the identity of Slider's killer. However, the knowledge won't do much good without action. Corbin decides to turn himself in so he can prove his innocence once and for all. He doesn't decide this without misgivings.

Corbin will discuss the matter with the characters and a few other Aberrants (probably Sophia Rousseau among them) before he makes his final decision. It will be difficult to sway him from his decision, and his determination may affect others when he discusses the matter (thanks to his power of mass emotion control). He really wants to work through his own misgivings before he steps into the limelight.

This scene should be emotional for everyone involved, simply because Corbin will be quite emotional, and he's not holding back. He's about to achieve what he's



spent the past year working for: justice (or so he hopes). Play up both his sense of triumph (at being so close) and inevitability (he fears that any trial will be terribly rigged or that Proteus will attempt to kill him). Corbin doesn't particularly care to die at this point. He intends to take as many of the bastards down with him as possible if it comes to that, but he wants to put the odds heavily in his favor, which might include QuanTech body armor or his old T2M uniform (for the armor protection of eufiber). Play him smart and clever.

Corbin's intention is to set the stage his way. He asks the characters to help coordinate defense against any Proteus attempts to silence him. He also contacts a few people he knows at N! to make sure his surrender has the maximum possible coverage (it's not so easy to make a hit on an international broadcast, he hopes).

Corbin doesn't make the contact himself. Instead, he asks someone else to do it, preferably far from his actual location. He has a prepared statement to pass along. If the characters pass it along, they might have an opportunity to get on the good side of one of the N! staff reporters. Corbin's surrender is a big deal, and maximum coverage means good things for the one who gets the scoop.

The Teragen

Corbin's surrender poses an opportunity for the Teragen. Raids conducted by Nova Vigilance and the Primacy against Proteus facilities have been moderately productive in that they've found (and possibly rescued) novas wrongfully held in secret captivity. It's only a logical conclusion that similar experiments go on inside the Bahrain facility (whether they do or not is up to the Storyteller). If Terats can time it properly, they can blow the doors wide open on Utopia's "experiments" with global OpNet coverage. It might also draw out some of Proteus' "secret police" for possible exposure. Specifically, Nova Vigilance, the Harvesters and the Primacy would be all over this plan.

Terats aren't stupid and do realize that the sheer number of novas present makes this a risky proposition. They hope that the exposure of Utopia's hidden agenda will at least sway a few novas' viewpoints before they start swinging. The raid will have to be executed carefully, with perfect timing. Terats need to be in position when Corbin arrives to blow the lid off.

In this matter, the Teragen would prefer to coordinate with the Aberrants (and hopefully bring a few members along to aid them). Most Aberrants don't want to thoroughly destroy Utopia as the Teragen hope to do, which is a cause of

friction in their alliance. It's possible that this particular point will strain or break it if one side or the other isn't careful. Any such friction will be noted and reported by moles within either faction.

Project Proteus

When word gets out that Corbin's about to turn himself in, elements in Project Proteus want to silence him as well, preferably in a manner that would put the blame on the Teragen. Turning both factions against each other is preferable to allowing both to continue targeting Proteus. If any Teragen were captured in previous sessions (such as Legwork, above), these would be the ideal novas to implicate in the scheme. Another option would be to activate moles within the Teragen and use them to kill Corbin. Either way, it should be done in as obvious a manner as is plausible.

Team Tomorrow members will be tasked to escort Corbin to the Bahrain detention facility, where he will be incarcerated until he is to stand trial for Slider's murder. Proteus believes that the best opportunity to strike will be at the Bahrain facility itself, especially given recent Teragen attacks upon Utopia facilities. Proteus operatives will be assigned along with the T2M escorts to insure everything happens as planned.

Teragen Roll Call

The following Pantheon members are present for the occasion. Caestus Pax will make a special point to give them his undivided attention when they show themselves. He will not be gentle.

- Synapse — He uses his ability to infiltrate Bahrain's electronic security systems with little trouble. While he's there in holographic form, he's not physically present and may not be noticed.

- Turncoat — He's already infiltrated Bahrain's security as a "baseline security guard." His power to blend in — even greater than Chiraben's — is of great use. During the battle, he'll try to use his abilities to confuse T2M and other opponents about who's really who, hopefully instigating fighting within the ranks.

- Shrapnel — She's there to provide physical force and little more. When the fighting starts, she'll beeline for Pax (and get brushed aside with only a little more consideration than the "average" nova. She's not hotheaded or stupid, she's simply outclassed).

- Geryon — He's there to provide more physical backup for the team if things go wrong.

- Leviathan — He's also present to provide physical backup.

Despite the power available here, the Terats aren't here to fight but to expose the truth. Each has his or her own reasons for coming, but it's not to kill.

The entire event will be a media nightmare. Cameras will run from the moment Corbin appears until he vanishes into the Bahrain facility's doors. Absolute care must be taken at all times to avoid exposure of Proteus operatives.

Moles within the Aberrants must try to get as close to Corbin before and during the affair as possible, to keep the situation under Proteus' control. The last thing Proteus needs is for any Aberrants to abscond with their prize before they can finish the job. When the moment comes, moles may need to engineer a distraction. Again, agents must take care to avoid compromising cover, or all bets will be off.

Project Utopia

Members of Team Tomorrow (preferably the characters, but Storyteller characters can fill out the ranks) along with Caestus Pax will be assigned to escort André Corbin to the Bahrain facility and protect him from assassination attempts. Other novas involved in earlier events might also be assigned, due to experience in the case or personal knowledge of Aberrants.

The mission begins with a briefing in which all known information approved for character eyes will be handed out and discussed and the mission goals will be laid out. Caestus Pax will not so subtly take command of the mission. This isn't entirely out of line, as he's the ranking member of Team Tomorrow worldwide (Backing 6). He will not be especially kind in asserting his authority over those with whom he's never worked before. Don't try to play up antagonism, but don't play him as nice or particularly approachable. He's quite taken with his own fame and expects this particular mission (he knows about the Proteus operation mentioned above) will be something of a personal apotheosis. He also hopes to draw Divis Mal out into the open.

Everything should move along smoothly, unless the Storyteller or players want to introduce complications along the way. With Aberrants, Proteus agents, Utopia novas, Team Tomorrow members and the Directive waiting for someone to twitch the wrong way, the whole event is a powder-keg waiting to erupt. Utopian novas are supposed to keep the lid on the whole thing as long as possible.



Why is this happening?

Why should Divis Mal show up and start blasting away? First, there's the matter of Pax treating Teragen Pantheon members like annoying bugs, but that aside — what could possibly interest him about showing up Caestus Pax? Ultimately, it's all part of Mal's plan. Divis Mal wants novas and baselines to tend to their own, rather than mingle without thought for the consequences. He's personally offended by Utopia's blatant (to him) attempts to harness novas to their agenda. Each nova should be allowed to explore her nature without interference from lesser beings. Do humans take orders from their pets?

Caestus Pax's intent is transparent to Divis Mal — he's perfectly aware that Pax wanted to draw him out (and has been trying to do so since the broadcast of *The Null Manifesto*). Not one to be manipulated, Mal chooses his appearances for maximum effect. The fight happens because of Divis Mal's sense of showmanship more than anything else. The recordings will be played and re-played for a long time, and Pax will lose a great deal of the thrill of being "the most powerful nova alive." Once Pax's brought down to Earth and understands he's just another nova, then perhaps he can be reasoned with.

Some Storytellers (or players) may be uncomfortable with a conflict that the characters cannot directly affect. If this is the case, both Caestus Pax and Divis Mal can be removed without unduly harming the scenario. It can be assumed that they clashed elsewhere. Their fight isn't vital to the situation at hand — in fact, by fighting, they remove themselves from any opportunity to affect the final outcome. Through their absence, only a few non-vital elements change.

Spectators or Actors?

This scene sets up a sensitive situation — two powerful Storyteller characters fight it out in such a way that the characters really have no hope to alter the outcome, no matter how hard they try. It's important to Aberrant continuity that Caestus Pax and Divis Mal meet, and it's best if this pivotal moment happens "on-screen." Still, Storytellers should avoid thoroughly upstaging the players and use the fight to its best advantage: as a distraction.

This is the perfect opportunity to knock any inconvenient Storyteller characters unconscious and take them out for the duration. The clash should serve as sufficient distraction for any novas who still retain their wits to do something, whether it's getting Corbin out of the way, killing Corbin, clearing baselines out of the line of fire, rescuing Gaal and Najarian from impending doom (they're not as invulnerable as they like to think) or finding evidence to hand over to N! reporters. At this point, Caestus Pax, Divis Mal, the characters and any stragglers the Storyteller deems to keep around are the only combatants remaining.

Whatever happens, give the characters plenty of opportunity to resolve the scenario (or fail miserably) to their satisfaction. The big battle really doesn't make a difference to the events going on around the characters, who are far more pivotal in the short term. Still, if someone wants to watch the fireworks like a slack-jawed tourist, indulge him, but don't force the confrontation as the central action.

The Directive

The Directive's interest is to draw out as many agents from as many factions as possible. Corbin's move seems perfectly timed for this. Agents on the scene will be asked to watch for anyone they recognize and, if possible, try to determine which faction they belong to. If violence breaks out, agents should call for backup and try to contain the situation before it spreads. At this point, the Directive probably trusts no one, least of all Utopia. The general feeling is that you can at least expect the Terats and Aberrants to act upon their ideals.

Mission parameters include identification and (if possible) capture of any high-ranking novas of any faction. The latter is preferable only if fighting breaks out. Otherwise, simply note their identities for later tracking. The Directive has no interest in proving Corbin's innocence, but it is still interested in finding the real killer.

Independents

When N! announces Corbin's intention to turn himself in, just about every nova on Earth probably has sufficient reason to find out what's really going on. It's pretty much common knowledge among novas that Corbin isn't guilty of Slider's murder, so speculation about what he hopes to accomplish will spread faster than wildfire. Any characters might (hopefully) be curious enough to find out what's going to go down during Corbin's arrest and confinement.

Rumors will run rampant about Utopia-sanctioned assassinations on Aberrant leaders and Corbin plotting some kind of last-minute derring-do to expose the truth on global broadcast. Literally, any over the top rumor is appropriate here. Tension runs high, as novas become aware that what happens over the next few days could very well change things for all of them.

Storytellers can also use ties to other factions to draw independents into the circus. Reporters could hire bodyguards for the event or any nova involved could drop a tip about the situation getting out of control or call in past favors owed.

Depending on their employers' agendas, DeVries novas could find this a perfect opportunity to take Corbin down or keep others from doing so. Perhaps they've been hired to "deal with" certain individuals in the Aberrant or Teragen movements, and this is a perfect opportunity to draw several of them into the open.

The Situation

André Corbin contacts the press to announce his intention to turn himself in and prove his innocence. He claims to know who the real murderer

is and that others hold the evidence. He's aware of the risk he's taking but assumes that no matter what happens, justice will be done, and Slider will be avenged.

Corbin states he will present himself for arrest in Bahrain, where he expects to be placed in custody at the detention facility. This is something of a characteristic move for Corbin — he intends this announcement to be a slap in Utopia's face. The Bahrain facility is at least semi-secret, and now, it'll be in the world's eye.

He consents to an interview before he turns himself in and will meet privately with Chris Gaal, of Gaal and Najarian (mentioned above), to give his side of the story. Note that, as above, Corbin feels very strongly about this topic, and his powers will affect Gaal, possibly provoking more sympathy.

From the time the announcement hits the "N!ews," Corbin will wait 48 hours before turning himself in. During that time, pretty much everyone will be scrambling to locate him or locate others looking for him. He expects a few hunters to be flushed out, but the real problems will start once he's back in the public eye. Corbin wants as many people as possible to witness his arrest, both in person and over the OpNet. He wants his surrender to be as public as possible to avoid any "misunderstandings."

Novas worldwide will begin scrambling for news on the Corbin situation. Many will try to be present for his surrender, for whatever reasons. Many have met Corbin in the past and might be happy or distraught at his current situation (Corbin's cockiness didn't make him a great many friends). Still, most novas don't want him dead, if only because they like to root for the underdog.

Several Aberrant characters will probably escort Corbin to his interview and from there to his chosen venue for surrender. Proteus novas will probably be split between the Utopia/T2M guard or milling with the spectators. Utopia and T2M novas will be divided between guarding Corbin directly and keeping an eye on the crowd. The Teragen will either be mingling with the spectators or preparing for a dramatic exit from the Bahrain facility (if they managed to get in earlier) at the right moment. Directive agents and independents could be anywhere. Characters may choose to go along with their respective factions or take up any position they find appropriate.

Once Corbin presents himself, the reporters all go astir. Corbin's nervousness will infect the crowd, making an already touchy situation even more sensitive. Everyone tries to get a better look, shoving commences and fights start to break out. This is an opportunity for novas to do some low-key defusing with whatever powers are avail-



able to them (socials Mega-Attributes, Empathic Manipulation, etc).

When the crowd calms down, Team Tomorrow moves in to take Corbin into custody, with Caestus Pax leading the charge. Baseline Utopia agents will move to clear a path for Corbin and T2M so they can get to a nearby vehicle and get Corbin to the Bahrain facility. The chemistry between Pax and Corbin is quite tense. Pax's attitude toward Corbin could best be described as "enraged disappointment," as if Corbin took Pax's every high expectation and threw it into his face. Corbin feels a mixture of guilt and rage at Pax for taking (so he sees) pleasure in finally "putting him down," and for the fact that, at one time, they almost could have been friends. Unfortunately, this mood infects everyone nearby, which reinforces Pax's feelings toward Corbin, in turn intensifying Corbin's reaction. By the time everyone's at the facility, the transport should be a lit firecracker.

Pax tries to maintain "good cheer" for the cameras. He's established himself as the iconic representative of Team Tomorrow and can't afford to damage that image. Even so, he will probably show just a bit of unnecessary roughness with Corbin, especially after Corbin's "Bender" power starts looping. If characters comment, Pax will back off — for the moment.

The situation should remain stable during the trip to the prison. Interested novas may have to find their own way there, but this can be dealt with on an individual basis. Keep track of characters who steal automobiles or otherwise illicitly acquire transportation. The trip to the facility isn't a long one by car but can take awhile on foot. Once T2M (probably the better part of two teams: Asia/Pacific and Central) and Corbin enter the gates, hell breaks loose.

Gaal and Najarian follow T2M to the facility, levitating all the way for a good angle as Gaal narrates the scene. When the facility is in view, Teragen members should be prepared to make their move. If characters got into the facility and got into position, they can steal the show right then. Some Terats will try to keep the Utopia novas occupied, while others (presumably the characters, if they're involved) will present evidence of Proteus activities directly to the press, hopefully prepared to explain the import of their discoveries.

At roughly the same time, Proteus assassins posing as Terats make their move to kill Corbin. Once Pax realizes what the real Teragen have, he will act to destroy the evidence, if it's computer records, photographs, recordings or other portable materials. If it's actual sedated novas from within the facility, he will use his Telekinesis to

keep them from being brought out into the open. Taking advantage of the moment, Pax will order the other T2M novas to stop the Teragen, hopefully leaving Corbin relatively unguarded for the Proteus attack. Any Terats who spot the disguised Proteus agents will likely give them little mercy (they won't kill, but they won't hesitate to put a stop to the charade). Chiraben's probably in on the attack, given his particular talents.

Once Proteus agents move in on Corbin, the Aberrants will move in on Proteus. The situation at this point is critical for everyone. Try to isolate the characters into one part of the conflict, and leave the rest to dramatic license. Take the time to describe this scene properly — the crackle of blue-white forces surrounding Caestus Pax as he closes his fist and crushes the evidence with kinetic force or sweeps the Teragen aside like they were nothing. Play up the raw power at his command, but don't inflict any real damage. It should be apparent that Pax is the most powerful nova in this particular conflict.

Caestus Pax will use his power to clear out attacking Aberrants, Teragen, independents and Directive agents. He will not interfere with the assassination attempt on Corbin (except, perhaps, to surreptitiously aid the Proteus operatives if they look like they're going under). At this point, thanks to the ubiquitous presence of cameras, reporters and other witnesses, the kid gloves are on. He's not going to inflict serious harm — nothing more than broken bones, concussions, etc. Anyone who's watching should be able to tell he's enjoying himself.

While Pax is the most potent player on the field, he's not the most important (nor is he invulnerable). The characters are — it doesn't really matter which faction they're in. Give the characters a chance to succeed at whatever goal they've chosen — protect, kill or capture Corbin, stop attacking Terats, or what-have-you. Anyone who tries to stop Pax will be knocked across the courtyard (10D10 bashing) for his troubles.

Confrontation

Everyone should be quantum fighting. Corbin's life hangs by a thread, confusion reigns and Caestus Pax stalks the battlefield like an unstoppable, angry god of war. At whatever moment is most dramatic (when the assassins are about to kill Corbin or when the characters are about to succeed or fail utterly), an intense flash of heat and light blasts the battlefield, followed immediately by a crash loud enough to split the world (this acts as Strobe ••••• against both sight and hearing but is directed at Caestus Pax and those closest to him. The characters should be

fine). When the smoke clears, a sharp-featured, red-haired man dressed in red and gold and surrounded by a fiery aura hovers over the glassy crater where Caestus Pax stood only moments before. Divis Mal's thunderous voice echoes across the courtyard, "Stand and face your better, lapdog."

Pax's answer to Divis Mal's taunt is a kinetic blast strong enough to knock him back several kilometers. Amazingly, Pax appears only slightly scorched when he levitates from the glassy crater. The minor burns he suffered in the initial attack swiftly fade as he regenerates. At this point, no one but Mal exists for Caestus Pax. If Pax kills Divis Mal, the T2M leader will have the ultimate notch in his belt (to him, anyway). It takes only seconds for Mal to cover the distance required to return to Pax, trailing a sonic boom and a white-hot trail of fire. More brilliant than a magnesium flare, Divis Mal is simply too bright to gaze upon directly. Mal speaks again, this time at a much lower volume, "Must we fight, Pax? Perform for the baselines' entertainment? How many action figures do you think this will sell if you win? And what if you lose? Can you really afford such a loss of face, here and now? What will your baseline masters say?"

Caestus Pax almost loses his composure. No one has ever come back after bearing the unmitigated brunt of his full kinetic blast. He recovers quickly, "This means a lot more to me than toy sales. Do you think that's all it is? That I only do this for the money or the public adoration? Utopia's building a better world, and it has no place for terrorists like you." While speaking, Pax telekinetically lifts a multi-ton chunk of earth and slams it into Mal from behind. As it comes into contact with the sun-bright corona surrounding Mal, the earth and rock melt, spattering off the plasma field and spraying the earth below with tears of hot obsidian. Mal himself floats forward. He gives Pax a bitter-sweet smile and sighs. "If that is how you want it, my friend, I'm more than happy to oblige." Divis Mal casually gestures toward Pax. A wall of plasma fills the courtyard with the light of a supernova. Pax, already in motion, slams into it and dangles in its grasp for a few very painful moments. His quantum-charged howl of pain rattles the courtyard, shattering every window in a mile radius. Pax barely manages to free himself from Mal's plasma field, but once free, he presses his attack, building a charge of force around his body as he flies forward, seemingly into the blazing heart of the sun itself. Once through, he discharges every erg of kinetic force at his disposal into Mal in a second, louder explosion. The cataclysm rips open the earth below, sunders nearby walls and knocks Mal back through one nearby hill and into another.

Divis Mal emerges from the hillside and brushes himself off, his flames extinguished by the force of Pax's attack, yet not a single hair is out of place. He smiles, slowly. "Is that the best you can do? I expected better from the baselines' favorite toy. After all, they do say you're the most powerful nova on Earth." This time, Mal meets Pax halfway, the collision of forces is audible even on the Saudi and Qatari mainland as the two cut loose. Forces sufficient to level entire cities surround the two combatants, making it impossible for anyone without protection to gaze directly at them. Within the space of 30 seconds, it becomes clear that the victor is Divis Mal.

The Teragen founder will not kill Caestus Pax but will leave him badly burned and mostly powerless, having stolen a great deal of his quantum and shut down most of his powers. Pax has suffered enough bashing damage to be incapacitated and significant lethal damage, but not enough to be in danger for his life. A healer will be able to awaken him, but it will be weeks before he can use any powers that require the expenditure of quantum.

Once it's over, the glow fades. The fiery aura dies away, Mal's preternaturally perfect features apparent to all. Divis Mal floats to the ground, gently lays Pax on his back and kisses him on the forehead. If anyone nearby has some form of enhanced hearing or Mega-Perception 2 or higher (and isn't deafened from the battle), she can hear Mal whisper, "It is a thing most sad to see a god stooping to serve monkeys. As you grow wiser, I hope you'll see the error of your ways. Perhaps next time, you'll listen." At this point, Mal will attend to any pantheon members who are injured.

If the characters are Utopia, Team Tomorrow or Proteus, Mal will encourage them to reconsider their loyalties and voluntary enslavement to lesser beings. He does not speak with bitterness or hatred but idealism. Play up the fact that he truly believes he knows what's best for all novas and that humanity will protect itself any way possible from novas. Given the events throughout **Aberrant: Worldwide**, with the presidential election, the events in the Sahara, the tainted nova Gabriel's escape from Proteus custody and the Slider affair, he has a point. His arguments should be persuasive and careful. He's not going to lie to the characters, but he will not admit that any good can come from novas fraternizing with baselines.

The characters may argue his conclusions, and he will thoughtfully listen to everything they have to say. Should a character make a worthwhile point, he will acknowledge it, but she will not convince him (he's had decades to think this through and consider viable counterarguments; he won't be easily swayed). If he does not convince them



to join the Teragen, he will encourage them to think it over. At that point, Divis Mal strides into the Bahrain facility. With a thought, Mal awakens all the sedated novas from slumber, both to liberate them and as a distraction for any Tomorrowites. Vaporizing doors or walls as necessary, Mal retrieves the chrysalis of Caroline Fong. Once his objective is achieved, Mal will gather the members of the Pantheon, and the assembly will vanish in a fiery flash.

If characters are Terats (or Aberrants if the alliance remains intact, possibly even if not) or seem sympathetic to his arguments, he'll offer a "lift home."

Characters who attack him or choose to simply offer insult or meaningless argument will be ignored or swatted away as appropriate. Divis Mal is civilized; he is not a bully, but he need not tolerate fools.

At this point, any further interactions with Divis Mal can be played out as the Storyteller and players see fit.

Conclusion

It's time to pick up the pieces, heal the wounded, bury the dead, recapture or aid the former prisoners of Bahrain and take stock of the situation at hand. At this point, Corbin could either be dead or ready for imprisonment, the Proteus assassins may very well have been caught and exposed, and the Teragen has made off with one prisoner and freed scores of others. If Corbin's alive, his "Bender" projects a sense of relief mingled with stark panic.

Information about some of Proteus' shadier activities could easily be plastered across some news channel or other, as novas freed from the Bahrain facility contact the media, a move which could seriously undermine Project Utopia's approval ratings if it isn't able to squelch the story altogether.

If Corbin survives the climax, evidence gathered during *Into the Arms of the Angel of Wrath* can be presented at his trial to prove his innocence (and to bring the real killer to justice, if that's what is desired). The Aberrants still intend to watch Utopia's activities, but they don't want to tear it down.

Regardless of other events, a great many novas have seen a side (or hints of it) of Utopia that isn't pretty. Word of Proteus' activities will spread through the nova community (via the Teragen, the Directive or the Aberrants and word of mouth), undermining a great deal of the trust novas held for Utopia previously. Teragen and Aberrant membership will probably swell over the next several months as novas re-think their loyalties. Others may simply choose to disassociate themselves

from any faction.

Gaal and Najarian sell the footage of the Mal/Pax confrontation to N! for just under 300 million dollars. It becomes an instant classic, and N! makes its money back within a year.

When Caestus Pax recovers, he swears to use the combined might of all four Teams Tomorrow to bring Divis Mal to justice for crimes against humanity and the United Nations. He's quite bitter about his defeat, and his actions take a darker, more brutal turn over the time that follows. Ironically, the sales of his action figure surge as children throughout most of the First World rush to reenact the great battle between Pax and Divis Mal.

Divis Mal may check up with anyone who seemed reasonable at the Bahrain facility. He understands the importance each individual nova holds (through personal power and generalized influence) and doesn't want to lose any by the wayside. He's philosophical about Caestus Pax's behavior ("He'll come around someday. Surely he must realize he's too important to serve as a lackey to baselines.") and feels that this is a phase that Pax will outgrow. The Divis Mal action figure marketed by Pandemonium Playthings rockets to the number one position and stays there. Much to his chagrin, Divis Mal becomes the favorite icon of college students, rebels, intellectuals and artists around the world. New Divis Malls spring up in over 50 cities around the world, where they are immediately swarmed by consumers wanting anything and everything with Divis Mal's name or image attached. School kids go crazy for the Teragen Collectible Trading Card Game. The Teragen suddenly becomes a wealthy organization.

Corbin's Trial

Corbin will be scheduled to be tried before the World Court in the Hague, Netherlands, on the charge of Jennifer Lander's Murder. If the characters spent this section tracking down the real killer, their evidence would certainly be applicable here. If the evidence as to the killer's true identity is conclusive, André Corbin will be off the hook (at least with the law). This trial could lead to more disclosure of Proteus' less savory practices as well. The end result will pretty much trash Utopia's public image, especially among novas.

If the evidence proves inconclusive, Corbin will be sentenced to life imprisonment without parole. Proteus will arrange to conveniently "lose" him somewhere, reporting a "successful escape attempt." The truth is that they will quietly execute him somewhere. Unfortunately, this will only give the Aberrants more ammunition, as "Corbin sightings" appear practically overnight. Corbin will become a martyr in the eyes of many.

The New York Times

November 9, 2009

Project Utopia Implicated In Scandals, Does Not Deny Claims

Today, representatives of the mysterious group known as the Aberrants brought forward evidence for their earlier allegations of massive corruption inside Project Utopia. Among the evidence they turned over to the World Court was information about last year's tragic murder of Jennifer "Slider" Landers. The Aberrants' spokesperson implicated a highly placed Project Utopia agent known only as Chiraben. According to the Aberrants, Chiraben killed Ms. Landers under orders from a secret cabal working inside Project Utopia. This evidence also allegedly clears André Corbin of all charges of wrongdoing in connection with Ms. Lander's murder. The Aberrants also claim to have evidence about the three day standoff last December involving Gabriel "The Miracle" Melchior. According to them, this situation was actually the last act of a drama which began when Project Utopia agents kidnapped Mr. Melchior in March of 2008 and subsequently enslaved him and used his abilities to aid in their African-based Operation Genesis. World Court representatives had no comment on either the allegations or the evidence, except to say that they are taking these allegations very seriously and that Project Utopia will have its day in court. We contacted Project Utopia about these charges. Their response is printed below.

"Any illegalities which may have occurred in connection with either the death of Jennifer Landers or the escape of Gabriel Melchior should be considered the work of extremists who have secretly been working inside Project Utopia. We are currently identifying such individuals and will make certain that they are all brought to justice."

This is the first time that Project Utopia has given any indication that these allegations are anything other than malicious slander and libel. Our sources inside Project Utopia confirm that far-reaching internal investigations are currently in progress. Excerpts from some of the statements presented by the Aberrant representatives are available for viewing on our OpNet site.

The New York Times

November 9, 2009

Corbin Charged In Sliders Death

Yesterday evening, ex-T2M member André Corbin was formally charged by the World Court with the murder of Jennifer "Slider" Landers on May 13, 2008. Project Utopia investigators, who have been working with law-enforcement officials since her murder last year, presented their evidence to the World Court three days ago. World Court and Project Utopia representatives both declined to reveal any details of the evidence. However, our sources inside Project Utopia did reveal that there is evidence that Mr. Corbin was mentally unbalanced at the time of the murder.

According to one source's anonymous deposition, which is now available for viewing on our OpNet site, Mr. Corbin developed a pathological hatred of Project Utopia after his dismissal from T2M. He then developed an elaborate delusion involving a plot by Project Utopia to sterilize novas and actively stamp out dissent. When he communicated these allegations to his close friend Jennifer Landers, she attempted to convince him to seek counseling. He then allegedly grew quite angry with her and killed her in a fit of rage. Our source will not confirm if there was some element of romantic jealousy in this murder.

NYT consulting psychologist Dr. Rebecca Kahn confirms that, if these events are correct, Corbin's disappearance from Ms Lander's funeral and his later allegations that she was killed by Project Utopia for attempting to reveal evidence of corruption within the Project represents a classic case of projection. According to Dr. Kahn, Corbin may have been unable to deal with his guilt over murdering Ms. Landers and extended his delusion to include the fact that she had actually been his ally and was killed by the very forces he had been attempting to enlist her aid against. Several members of T2M have expressed sorrow and regret at the charges against Corbin and have joined other Project Utopia representatives in stating that they hope André Corbin finally receives the psychological help he needs.

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Mal Crushes Pax, *The National Enquirer* 10/15/10

A spectacular confrontation between T2M leader Caestus Pax and rogue Teragen nova Divis Mal occurred outside the Bahrain Rashoud facility. Although this was Mal's first known battle with another nova, he demonstrated that he could fulminate and fly at least as well as he can agitate. The fight began when Mal allegedly arrived to take André Corbin to the secret Teragen base when he turned himself over to the authorities to be tried for the murder of Jennifer "Slider" Landers.

Pax immediately flew at Mal, clearly intending to use his classic high-speed flying punch. Moving at close to the speed of sound, he was on Mal almost before Mal had a chance to react. The force of the blow knocked Mal into a nearby wall and produced a large cloud of dust and rubble. Pax landed and, with a clearly satisfied expression, began to methodically dig through the rubble when Mal suddenly pushed the rubble aside and stood up, completely unharmed.

At this point the battle began in earnest. Pax threw punch after devastating punch, while Mal either ignored them or deftly blocked them with bolts of glowing energy. In return, Mal stood calmly amidst the rubble and repeatedly struck Pax with devastating blasts of nova-created fire. When he realized Mal was merely toying with him, Pax grew increasingly angry and began shouting at the Terat. Mal then appeared to grow tired of the contest and attacked Pax with a blindingly actinic flare of quantum devastation. Charring almost half of Pax's famous eufiber costume off of his bruised body, this attack knocked Pax senseless. After stepping over Pax's unconscious form, Mal opened a hellishly red warp and vanished.



Introduction

The two *New York Times* headlines at the beginning of the setting material represent the two extreme poles of the possible outcomes of these scenarios. On the one hand, the truth about Slider's death could come out, along with numerous revelations about the other excesses and crimes committed by people within Project Utopia. On the other hand, Project Utopia could escape completely unscathed, and Corbin might be openly blamed for Slider's death. While the actual result of your own scenario may fall somewhere in between, one or the other of these two headlines may prove a useful aid to show the players at the end of these scenarios.

The Scandals Come Out

If at the end of these scenarios the characters have exposed Project Utopia's and Project Proteus' rolls in The Miracle and Slider scandals, they will have helped reshape the roll Project Utopia will play in world politics. Public trust in Project Utopia will hit an all-time low, and the UN General Assembly, with the support of the Security Council, will demand greater oversight over large-scale Project Utopia works, including Operation Genesis. Of course, Project Utopia will not be caught completely unprepared. Shortly after the initial allegations are made public, Project Utopia will denounce Project Proteus as a small conspiracy of fanatics and madmen within their midst. The leaders of Project Utopia will also instruct the Triton Foundation to release cures for diabetes and several forms of blindness a few months after the initial allegations come to light.

While Project Utopia will not regain its previous reputation, the tens of thousands helped by these treatments will be powerful advocates for the good it does perform. Similarly, highly public firings and subsequent trials of a number of troublemakers and minor functionaries associated with Project Proteus will serve to provide the public with the scapegoats it needs. However, Slider's murderer Chiraben will remain at large.

While Project Utopia officials will turn over everything they know about the elusive assassin, capturing a shapeshifter who can instantly take the form of anyone else will be quite difficult. Using the information released by Project Utopia, characters who feel a strong need to avenge Slider's death could easily make the hunt for Chiraben their next scenario. His high level of power, combined with his love of violence, his paranoia and his contacts in various intelligence

The Price of Fame

Regardless of their political allegiances, if the characters' role in uncovering The Miracle and Slider scandals becomes public, they will become celebrities. If this occurs, give every character a minimum Influence of two and add one dot to the Influence of any character with an Influence of two or higher. As the people who exposed the truth about Slider's murder, the characters literally represent the Aberrant cause to the world, regardless of the characters' actual loyalties. Anything the characters say about Project Utopia or anything else even remotely related to novas will be repeated on N!, the OpNet and on numerous local radio stations and newspapers around the world.

Unless the characters continue to perform publicly notable acts, their celebrity will fade within a month or two (at which point the above bonuses to Influence are lost). However, in the meantime, reporters follow them around, and everyone will ask them about their politics, their love lives and their opinions on other celebrities. The characters will also be bombarded with literally hundreds of requests for product endorsements, licensing agreements and similar hype. Novation will even ask the characters for the rights to produce their action figures.

As a part of this celebrity, at least one news/talk show will ask the characters and Project Utopia representatives to face each other in a televised discussion. During this show and on several other occasions, Project Utopia officials will attempt to garner the characters' support. If the Utopia officials fail at this, then Project Proteus will attempt to find some way to destroy the characters' credibility.

As a result of their celebrity, the characters will also come under a great deal of scrutiny. For the next few months, the Storyteller should also reduce all of the characters' Cipher ratings by one dot. With literally dozen of reporters, fans and Project Proteus personnel investigating every aspect of their lives, any number of dark secrets could come to light. If the characters actually belong to an organization like the Teragen or the Directive, this fact may come to light, much to the displeasure of the characters' allies or superiors. Even if no secrets of this magnitude exist, characters should at least expect to hear people they dated a decade ago talking about their relationships on the OpNet. In addition, any scenarios undertaken by the characters during this time will become both public and newsworthy, unless the characters are incredibly careful in concealing their movements and activities.

Ideologically motivated characters could use their brief period of notoriety to advance some cause, like helping to discredit Project Utopia or advancing the cause of a religious, ethnic or sexual minority. Characters with more pragmatic motives could simply attempt to work out profitable deals for product endorsements and make large amounts of money. Regardless of how the characters react to their brief fame, it should impact all facets of their lives.

and underworld communities (all under different names and identities) will make him a very hard target to kill or apprehend. Characters will also have to contend with numerous nova bounty hunters and glory-hogs who are also attempting to capture or kill him. However, the group which brings Chiraben to justice will win lasting popular acclaim, as well as the knowledge that they brought a heartless killer to justice.

Once the trials are over, Project Utopia will attempt to return to business as usual but with a seriously tarnished reputation and with considerably less nova support. Even after it releases its medical breakthroughs, many people will continue to associate Project Utopia with Slider's death, and over a third of all novas will withdraw allegiance to Project Utopia. While the top echelons will be largely untouched by the scandals, changes will occur within Project Utopia. A number of its more idealistic leaders, including Project Utopia Director Justin J. Laragione are honestly horrified at the actions of Project Proteus and vow to make significant changes to the organization. Director Thetis may even be forced to resign or brought to trial.

The extreme secrecy of Project Proteus means that its leaders are incapable of making such changes alone. One possible continuation of this series is for the characters to help root out further corruption in Project Utopia. If the characters already belong to Project Utopia, they can do this on their own. Otherwise, the characters' public roll in uncovering the truth about Slider's death and the excesses in Operation Genesis could easily lead to them being contacted by a powerful Project Utopia official interested in eliminating or completely reforming radical elements like Project Proteus.

However, while the leaders of Project Utopia unite in their decision to root out all traces of Project Proteus, the members of the mysterious Aeon Society will continue their backing of Project Proteus. The top ranks of the Aeon Society shelter the leaders of Proteus and continue its objectives. Since no one outside of the highest ranks of the Aeon Society knows of its backing of Proteus, all Project Utopia and the characters will know is that the leadership of Project Proteus continues to elude justice. Pursuing this covert conflict between Utopia and Proteus can form the basis for an extended chronicle where the characters gradually uncover the roll the Aeon Society plays in this conflict and the willingness of the Aeon Society to use any means necessary to reduce the possible threat posed by novas.

Another possible result of the revelations about Project Utopia is that the United Nations will seek to employ its own novas to keep track of

Presenting Project Utopia

If the scandals come out, the characters will have personally witnessed the depths of the corruption within Project Utopia. However, Project Utopia should not be portrayed as a malevolent and corrupt organization. The key to presenting it is to make sure that the characters understand both sides of Project Utopia. Project Utopia is a benevolent organization that has already eliminated pollution and AIDS and is making the world a significantly better place to live. The vast majority of its leaders are devoted and tireless idealists who genuinely wish to use the vast powers of novas to help humanity. Millions are alive, healthy and living free from hunger and want because of the work Project Utopia has done. Unfortunately, a few of its leaders and other personnel have very specific ideas about the shape the future should take and are willing to use almost any means to make sure that they attain their vision. As a result, Project Utopia is a source of great good that also contains a nucleus of ruthless corruption. Also, even the amoral heads of Project Proteus are dedicated idealists who see themselves as the saviors of the world. Fearful of the havoc and terror uncontrolled novas could wreak Proteus members have vowed to use any means at their disposal to protect the masses of baseline humanity from nova depredations.

Through their contacts with various Project Utopia personnel, allow the characters to see that most of the evils within Project Utopia are the result of good people allowing the ends to justify the means once too often. Allow the characters to see both the good and the bad and make their own decisions as to how they wish to relate to Project Utopia. Let the characters make up their own minds as to whether Project Proteus' ends really do justify its means. With the exception of a few sociopaths like Chiraben, no one in Proteus enjoys murdering or imprisoning novas, they merely see these as actions which are necessary to protect humanity from being overrun.

the actions of various important organizations that employ novas, including both Project Utopia and the Directive. If the characters' roll in exposing the scandals is publicly known, the UN might actively recruit the characters to become the first members of this team.

If the characters powers and abilities lend themselves to the task, they will be asked to gather information on the actions of the various other organizations, either through surveillance or through active infiltration. A group of more physically oriented characters might instead be asked to perform active interventions when the UN uncovers evidence of wrongdoing by any of these organizations.

In either case, the characters will have substantial connections within the UN, including at least 3 dots in Backing. However, they will also

have already earned the enmity of Project Utopia and Project Proteus. During the course of the characters subsequent adventures, they will also likely end up working against the Directive, the Teragen and the Yakuza. In addition to their work on behalf of the UN, the characters will also have to deal with threats, bribes, and even active violence from the most violent members of these various organizations.

Public Reaction

Of course, the methods the characters used to expose these scandals will be almost as important as the scandals themselves. Even if it was only directed against criminals and murderers, if the characters used a high level of violence during the various scenarios, people will remember this violence as much as the scandals. If the scenarios end with a high body count, both the general public and numerous world leaders will become increasingly aware of the dangers posed by novas. With only 6,000 worldwide, the actions of even a small group can affect the perception of the entire nova population. If the characters are known to have injured or killed numerous people during the course of the four scenarios, the negative reaction against Project Utopia could also result in an increase in the size and militancy of anti-nova hate groups like the Church of Michael Archangel.

If the characters exposed the scandals by using high levels of violence and terror, especially if any of this violence was directed against baselines, religious fanatics and the fearful will see novas as increasingly dangerous and untrustworthy. People who already distrust novas will see that the novas who engaged in criminal conspiracies responsible for murder, slavery and similar amoral acts were only defeated by other novas who were perfectly happy to use high levels of violence to achieve their ends. At this point, an increasing number of such people will regard all novas as inherently dangerous and threatening. If such a reaction occurs, the American Eagle Party will gain significant ground in the United States, and anti-nova cults and hate groups will spread to numerous nations, including China, Saudi Arabia, Russia and several in Africa. As a result of this increase in anti-nova fanaticism, the Teragen will gain numerous members, and open conflict between radical novas and militant bigots will become increasingly common in the most repressive of these nations. At this point, the characters must decide if they wish to support the Teragen's efforts to help stop the spread of anti-nova demagogues or if they will attempt to find another way to deal with relations between novas and fearful baselines.

Project Proteus will attempt to stop this increased level of nova violence. The leaders of Project Utopia honestly wish to change the world and make it a better, freer and more prosperous place for all its inhabitants. However, the increase in violence and militancy on both sides will alarm them, causing a few of these leaders to begin to support Proteus' repressive agenda. In addition, the loss of public support will cause Project Utopia to pursue an increasing number of secret projects whose goals may be noble but whose implementation is occasionally illegal or immoral. Within a few years Project Proteus and Teragen will be using extremely similar tactics. In time, the only real difference between these two organizations will be the fact that Project Proteus claims that it is seeking to protect humanity from novas, while Teragen members claim to be attempting to protect novas from humanity.

However, if the characters managed to avoid public murder or other serious violence against baselines, then they could easily become the new ideals of heroic novas. The exposure of these scandals will effectively make the Aberrant's agenda public. If the characters' roll in uncovering The Miracle and Slider scandals is also publicly known, then numerous reporters will be asking the characters for their opinions on Project Utopia and their possible affiliations. If they choose to do so, the characters are in a position to either openly endorse or reject the Aberrant's agenda.

Whether they were Aberrants from the beginning or unwittingly helped that cause as they uncovered various problems with Project Utopia, the characters now represent a highly visible alternative to the corruption within Project Utopia. As publicly known Aberrants at a time when the Aberrants have suddenly gone from being suspicious villains to heroes, the characters can help shape the public's reaction to the Aberrant cause for years to come. Of course, if the characters attempt to use their fame to shape public opinion in this way, they will suddenly be deluged with phone calls and OpNet messages from Project Utopia representatives, fellow Aberrants and representatives of many other groups, all asking the characters to espouse certain beliefs and opinions.

If the characters come out strongly in favor of the Aberrant cause and loudly denounce Project Utopia's excesses, Project Proteus will attempt to discredit them. After the Slider scandal, Proteus would rather not kill the characters. However, if Proteus can uncover any dark secrets about them, the characters can expect to be blackmailed. If the characters have lead reasonably moral and law-abiding lives, then Project Proteus will attempt to frame them for various

crimes. Proteus' attempts may include trying to slip a character a dose of a highly illegal drug like soma during a party or arranging for a double agent within the Teragen to attempt to recruit the characters. Proteus will also attempt to exploit all of the characters' weaknesses, such as hiring an underage prostitute to seduce a particularly lecherous character or attempting to provoke a character with a short temper into attacking an especially annoying baseline reporter. Essentially, Project Proteus will attempt to manufacture incidents that will catch one or more of the characters performing a highly illegal or immoral activity.

Characters who escape such snares and deal with their newfound fame in a careful and responsible manner will be able to make a highly favorable impression on many world leaders and on much of the general public. If desired, the characters can convince much of the world that the Aberrants are not Teragen terrorists and that their plan to clean up the corruption which has tainted Project Utopia is a noble and valuable goal. While a few fanatics will now distrust all novas, the Aberrants will be frequently featured on N!, and for at least the next few months they will become the latest nova craze. See the section entitled *The Price of Fame* on page 148 for further information on the other effects notoriety may have on the characters.

The Scandals Are Suppressed

If *The Miracle* and *Slider* scandals are safely resolved in Project Utopia's favor, then none of the changes described above will take place. While the suppression of these scandals may be the result of complete failure by the characters, it is more likely the result of a highly successful effort by characters who belong to Project Proteus or the Directive or by characters who are exceptionally loyal members of Project Utopia. Regardless of who the characters work for, playing a pivotal roll in suppressing scandals which could have rocked the very foundations of Project Utopia will place them in a highly unusual position. If the characters appear happy with the roll they played, they will be suitably rewarded with long paid vacations and similar material pleasures (give all of the characters a minimum of three dots in Resources). However, if any of the characters begin to openly question their roll, they are putting themselves in grave danger. Few people outside of the highest levels of Project Utopia and Project Proteus know as much as the characters do concerning the truth about Project Utopia. Characters who become uncomfortable with their roll in

the cover-up will begin to hear rumors that their loyalty is in doubt and should receive hints that their lives may be in danger. At this point, one or more of the characters may choose to flee. Since fleeing will result in their being actively hunted, the Storyteller should make it clear that their best chance of survival is to seek sanctuary with a group that seeks to oppose Project Utopia or Project Proteus. Obvious options include the Directive, the Teragen, the Aberrants or even criminal groups like the Heaven Thunder Triad, all of which possesses the power and connections to hide fugitives from Project Proteus. The characters' choice of allies will then determine the future shape of the chronicle. They could gain vast amounts of wealth and power helping a criminal gang blackmail Project Utopia, or they could risk their lives helping the Teragen or the Aberrants free other novas from Project Utopia's containment facilities.

All of the above information presumes that the characters were working for Project Utopia or Project Proteus. It is also possible that the scandal won't come to light if the characters work for the Directive. Once their superiors know about these scandals, the Directive is unlikely to reveal the truth about Project Utopia. Instead, the Directive will use this information as leverage to gain a significant amount of influence over Project Utopia. While neither the Directive nor Project Utopia is ready for open conflict, the blackmail information provided by the characters will allow the Directive to suggest some changes in Project Utopia's policies. The characters could then help the Directive continue to monitor Project Utopia's activities and act as part of an unofficial oversight team which uncovers further Project Utopia machinations and helps keep them from performing secret activities which the Directive disapproves of.

Alternatively, if the Storyteller prefers a truly dark and conspiratorial game, the leadership of the Directive may use the information they have obtained to force the beginnings of a secret alliance between the Directive and Project Proteus. From this point onward, while the two organizations continue to jockey for power, they are also working together to overthrow Project Utopia and force newly erupted novas to register with the UN as part of a "solution to the nova situation." Characters who joined the Directive for ideological reasons may seek to stop this plan, while characters that are more pragmatic may see it as an opportunity for vastly increasing their wealth and power.

On a larger scale, the rest of the world will continue on much as before. Disheartened at their failure to expose Project Utopia's corruption and

at the likely imprisonment or death of Corbin, many Aberrants will leave the organization. Other more radical Aberrants will abandon peaceful and legal means and will seek to ally themselves with the Teragen in an effort to build a powerful force that can effectively fight Project Utopia's growing domination. After several bombings on Project Utopia facilities, the Aberrants will become widely known as merely another branch of Teragen terrorists who have a particular hatred of Project Utopia.

Some nations may call for greater control over the lives of novas. As nova violence and terrorism continue, plans will be put forward for all novas to register with the nation they are living in, as well as with the UN. Several nations will even call for all novas to have their powers and capabilities documented and tested at one of Utopia's Rashoud facilities. Project Utopia and, more importantly, Project Proteus will be well on its way to gaining control of the vast majority of the nova population, all in the guise of preserving order and preventing terrorism. Novas who protest these plans will be seen as dissidents and potential terrorists. Also, most world leaders and numerous popular organizations will now be certain that Project Utopia is a benevolent organization that seeks to protect humanity from the excesses of dangerous nova groups like the Teragen and the Aberrants.

Dramatis Personae

Any number of Storyteller characters can be involved in Into the Arms of the Angel of Wrath, especially at the climax. A dozen or more novas could get into the big finale, but none of these Storyteller characters will be defined here. Novas from previous chapters could easily show up as interested parties, as could characters from other **Aberrant** supplements or the core rules.

It's important to note that none of these characters should be treated as extras, fill-ins or bystanders — only 6,000 or so novas exist in the world, and any single nova has the power of a god at her fingertips. Each should be important, each should have a role to fill, and each should have a goal to accomplish. Each nova should be "on camera" for a reason and may have an influence on the game for a long time.

André Corbin

Background: Born March 23, 1985 — 13 years before N-Day, Corbin managed to pull himself from his working class origins in Leith and became a world-class football player in London.

He dominated the sports world, to an extent that many thought he would save the field of baseline sports from obscurity — if he didn't tear it down in a spectacular crash and burn catastrophe typical for his life. His cocky manner alienated a great many people during his sporting career, including his team's fans.

His eruption, during the World Cup playoffs between the UK and Nigeria, sparked a nasty riot which led to several fans suffering serious injuries. Corbin himself, invited to join Team Tomorrow (to bolster their public image), accepted.

Unfortunately, Corbin's mockery of his teammates, his lack of respect for authority and his participation in "extracurricular affairs" quickly led to his suspension and retirement from T2M. His only tie was with Jennifer "Slider" Landers.

Slider was murdered shortly after she came to Corbin with her Utopia conspiracy theory, sparking Corbin's own curiosity (and sense of revenge). When she first spoke of her suspicions, he was skeptical. Only after her death did he take her fears seriously. He went into hiding, and Sophia Rousseau contacted him shortly thereafter. From there, he and Sophia have recruited over 100 novas to the Aberrant banner in the months since Slider's death. For the first time, Corbin's found himself in a position of real responsibility, and the experience has matured him rapidly.

He's calmed down considerably from his wild days in Team Tomorrow and afterward. Jennifer's death sobered him greatly, and later knowledge of Proteus activities has shown him just how serious matters have become. He's still not perfectly organized or the best leader, but he's improved drastically during the past year.

Corbin's come to the conclusion that the only way to see justice for Lander's death is to bring the truth out where everyone has to see it. He can't afford to hide any longer, and he can't afford to run. He's going to make a stand and surrender himself to the authorities — to clear his name, to insure the killer is punished and to prove to himself that he can handle his responsibilities.

Nature: Somewhere between Gallant and Martyr
Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Appearance 4, Manipulation 4, Charisma 4

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 5, Biz 2, Brawl 3, Command 2, Drive 2, Endurance 4, Etiquette 3 (How to break it for maximum effect), Intimidation 3, Investigation 3, Linguistics 2, Martial Arts 3, Might 3, Rapport 4, Resistance 3, Streetwise 2, Style 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 4, Eufiber 5, Influence 4, Node 3, Resources 2

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 6, Taint 4

(Empathic Leakage — uncontrollable Empathic Manipulation during times of extreme emotion, reflecting Corbin's emotions)

Mega-Attribute: Mega-Strength • (Crush), Mega-Dexterity •• (Physical Prodigy), Mega-Stamina •• (Durability), Mega-Perception •• (Electromagnetic Vision), Mega-Wits • (Enhanced Initiative x 2, Quickness x 2), Mega-Manipulation • (Persuader)

Quantum Powers: "Bender" — Empathic Manipulation ••• (Area)

Powerful Novas

In 2009, fewer than 10 novas exist who have developed Quantum higher than five: Caestus Pax, Divis Mal, Gabriel Melchior, Jeremiah Scripture, Dr. Spencer Balmer, Sophia Rousseau and perhaps two or three others. Most are unknown to the general populace of baselines and novas. These novas are a sign of the future, of what will be possible for any nova who tries to reach her full potential.

Caestus Pax

Caestus Pax is powerful — before the events in this book, he's the most powerful nova known on Earth. He has city-cracking power and is unafraid to use it. He's the terror of baseline and nova tyrants worldwide, he's a nightmare to those who would stand against Team Tomorrow. He's the living symbol of Utopia's intent for nova and baseline to live safely side by side.

Caestus Pax loves the attention he gets. He's *numero uno badass* in a world of demigods. There are, at most, a handful or two of novas who have Quantum 5+, and Pax knows he's the best of them all.

Pax sees his confrontation with Divis Mal as the opportunity for an apotheosis of sorts. When Pax faces Mal down and destroys him, Pax's public image and approval ratings will *skyrocket*.

Note that Caestus Pax is almost inhumanly obsessed with his image. To him, nothing is more important than boosting his franchise astronomically or being seen as the toughest badass on planet Earth. He sees his position as Team Tomorrow leader as one of the best ways to do this — he can kick ass and get paid for it (and receive the admiration of millions).

Should the characters attack Pax, he will attempt to hospitalize — but not kill — them. This shouldn't be too difficult a task. He will try to intimidate them into backing down before he actually takes any direct action and will give them plenty of chances to back down.

Pax is keenly aware that Divis Mal held back. After the confrontation, Pax desires nothing more

than to turn Divis Mal into paste in as public a fashion as possible. Pax doesn't accept defeat easily, and this is the worst he's had to deal with.

Nature: Bravo

Traits: Aside from Quantum 6, we're leaving Caestus Pax's Traits something of a mystery. For the purposes of running this story, give him whatever he needs. Pax has demonstrated the following powers in the past:

- Mega-Strength ••••• (Lifter, Shockwave, Thunderclap), Mega-Dexterity ••••• (Fast Tasks, Rapid Strike), Mega-Stamina ••••• (Adaptability, Durability, Hardbody, Regeneration), Mega-Perception ••• (High-End EMG Scan), Mega-Wits •• (Quickness) and Mega-Charisma • (Commanding Presence).

- Pax manipulates kinetic energy, on a city-shattering level. He has very potent Telekinesis, Elemental Mastery (Kinetic Energy — generally destructive effects), Quantum (Kinetic) Bolt, Claws (Kinetic augmentation of his punches), Flight, Hypermovement (Flight), Force Field, Invulnerability (Kinetic Energy), etc.

- With Quantum 6, Pax has access to generally unknown degrees of power, allowing him to use his powers for a very low quantum point cost, over wide areas or to easily hit a target from orbit. Assume he can add two additional Extras beyond Level 3 to any (or all) of his powers.

Divis Mal

Divis Mal is Caestus Pax's opposite in more ways than one. As Pax is the iconic representative of Team Tomorrow and Project Utopia, Mal is the same for the Teragen. Mal is the most powerful nova on Earth.

Divis Mal is not a monster in intent or action, despite his bad press. He's charming, compassionate and committed to his vision. He treats baselines well, in a noblesse oblige sort of manner. He honestly believes that novas are no longer human and have no business associating with humanity or responsibility for aiding in its collective endeavors. He's very philosophical on this point but isn't particularly interested in forcing the other Teragen members to think in the same way. In Mal's opinion, *The Null Manifesto* represents a starting point: Where each Teragen takes it from there is her own choice.

Mal sees Caestus Pax as a victim more than anything else: a victim to Utopia's attempts to enslave novas to human needs, a victim to public opinion and a victim to his own lack of vision. He would like nothing better than to bring Caestus Pax into the Teragen — hence Mal's refusal to kill Pax in this encounter.

Divis Mal will take the opportunity to convert the characters, if given the chance. His honest belief that his vision is the best of all possible worlds for novas should be vividly apparent — and not simply through the nuances of Mega-Charisma. He will not harm the characters, to give them time to think his arguments over. He will use enough force to stop an attack, but sees no particular reason to cripple or kill any characters so foolish. They are not malicious, only misguided.

Nature: Visionary

Traits: As with Caestus Pax, we're not providing a large degree of detail regarding Divis Mal's Traits. Note that even more so than Caestus Pax, Divis Mal has whatever powers the Storyteller requires of him. Following are some known powers:

- Mal has every Mega-Attribute rated at least at three dots and several at five. He also has enough enhancements to accomplish most of what he needs for any occasion.

- Divis Mal's powers focus on the control, creation and use of plasma. The short list of his quantum abilities includes Armor (Impervious, Superheavy), Disrupt (Increased Duration), Imolate (Plasma: Aggravated), Quantum (Plasma) Bolt (Aggravated, Armor Piercing, Burning, Increased Range, Supercharge), Elemental Anima (Plasma), Elemental Mastery (Plasma), Flight, Hypermovement (Flight), Disintegration, Temporal Manipulation, Force Field (Impervious), Invulnerability (Broad Categories — Physical, Energy), Psychic Shield, Quantum Leech, Quantum Regeneration, Sensory Shield, Strobe (Visual/Auditory) and Stun Attack (Heat Exhaustion). Apply whatever else seems appropriate. Other powers usable by Divis Mal and other novas with Quantum ratings of six and up will appear in *The Aberrant Player's Guide*.

- Mal has access to greater degrees of power than Caestus Pax, as well as a few previously unknown powers available only to those with a high Quantum. Due to Mal's Quantum 8, he may add three Extras to any power already at L3, allowing for many of the same effects Pax has. Where Pax can affect cities, Mal can affect continents, where Pax has orbital range, Mal can actually direct his fire around any obstacle (including the planet) to hit anything he desires. Finally, where Pax has vastly reduced quantum costs for his powers, Mal often pays nothing to use his. Additionally, Mal has access to a few powers unlike any ever seen before: He can sense novas (latent and active) over an area the size of Texas with little effort — conversely, he can also conceal his own quantum signature with near-total efficacy. With some difficulty, he can distinguish "quantum signatures" to

identify individuals. Mal can sense energy production/usage over a wide area (a city, perhaps larger) and manipulate it if necessary, causing blackouts or surges or interfering with quantum powers over a wide area (several novas at once). This can be applied selectively. Finally, he can focus his power on one nova and effectively shut that nova's M-R node down for a time — several weeks on the outside. The effect is somewhat similar to Dormancy, only the target can't voluntarily reactivate his powers. Mal can, conversely, use this power to help one or more latent novas erupt and perhaps guide the form that eruption takes. He prefers to avoid shutting a nova down and considers it a most unnatural punishment. Finally, he can transmit a signal through a communications system and override all other signals. He can narrow it to a single band over a short distance or cover all bands with global range.

Divis Mal's powers have transcended the initial limits his own expectations once imposed. He does have a devastating mastery over plasma and other forms of energy, but he's sufficiently advanced in his understanding of the M-R node and quantum powers that he can develop nearly any power or set of powers he decides to manifest (given time and effort, naturally).

Other Possibilities

The four scenarios presented in this book take place between the fall of 2008 and fall of 2010. Many other events unfold in the world of Aberrant during this same period of time that can be the basis for single games or whole series. The following three concepts all reflect the evolving world of Aberrant and present events that characters may either hear about or get involved with. The Storyteller is encouraged to follow up on these plot hooks at her leisure, possibly as one-shots or short series to add variety to an ongoing Aberrant storyline.

Who Launched the Nuke?

On July 28, 2009, during heated conflict between Israel and Syria, someone authorized a nuclear strike against Damascus, the capitol of Syria. Donald Zeleckis, a nova tourist, somehow became aware of the launch and pulled the missile off course, where it detonated in the upper atmosphere. In the aftermath, the Israeli government denies all knowledge of the act. In truth, the launch was suicidal. Had Zeleckis not acted as quickly as he did, Syria and other Arab nations would have responded in kind, leading to complete meltdown in the Middle East.

The question arises: Who did authorize the

launch? Did a cyberkinetic nova somehow break in and use her powers to activate the missile? Did another use powers of mind control on the officers on duty? Did the prime minister or the military commander give the order to launch? It could be a nova terrorist, at least on the surface. Once authorities capture the party behind the incident, odds are good that the situation leads to a deeper and more dangerous conspiracy.

Utopia or the Directive operatives (members of T2M for Utopia) offer to assist the Israeli and Syrian governments in investigating the matter. While both Israel and Syria put on a good face for the public, tensions between them are higher than ever. One misstep can lead to even more intense warfare. Investigations will likely uncover agents within the Israeli government who arranged for the launch (through the person of a nova terrorist). Tracking through them to find out where they received their orders might lead to a radical Palestinian faction whose intention is to destroy Israel for all time or perhaps Israeli agents who seek to force a nuclear exchange — for whatever reason.

Is Project Proteus trying to flush out the novas it knows Israel has? Are the Companions of the Teragen making a power play? Try to develop this hook into something deep and rife with international intrigue. Literally, the trail could lead anywhere, depending upon Storyteller preferences. This hook could be used to bring the characters more directly into geopolitical maneuvering. Certainly, if they track down the culprit, it's useful to have a government who owes one a favor.

New Kid on the Block

Several baseline businessmen have pooled their resources to put together a network to (they hope) rival N!. Once the framework's established, they seek out promising novas who may not get as much coverage through N! as they might want and offer them increased coverage in exchange for temporary exclusivity. Somewhere along the way, they also manage to pick up a few big names, which puts a noticeable (but not harmful) crimp in N!'s ratings.

In retaliation, N! starts giving novas who've gone over bad press. Nothing incorrect, just a matter of spin. In response, the new network returns the favor. A desperate executive might decide to go a little further and "arrange" newsworthy events so the new network can cover them before N!. This stands a good chance to backfire.

Characters might be approached for exclusives early on, hired for security work or

paid to sabotage N!. Note that any nova who's caught sabotaging N!'s equipment is likely to get blacklisted — at the very least. Certainly, lawsuits or criminal prosecution would be in order.

The feud might lead to some novas calling each other out for supporting the other network or possibly social ostracism in some circles. Sure, it's only a network, right? Play this well and the characters could help an up-and-comer take a strong position in the modern media or destroy it utterly before it gets too large.

Truly inspired characters might take the example offered and establish yet a third nova network. The end result here can easily transform modern media.

Fear and Loathing in the Megasyndicate

The characters receive a frantic call from Dr. Duke Rollo, Post-Gonzo journalist. He's under the impression that one of his stories got the Camparelli-Zhukov Megasyndicate to take out a hit on him, and he'd like both security and someone who can help him negotiate his way out of this mess. N! will cover Dr. Rollo's expenses here, since they'd like to keep him around.

If the characters agree to take the job, when they meet the doctor, a few Camparelli soldiers try to complete the hit. The characters should be able to handle them easily. As noted above, Rollo doesn't simply want protection, he wants to make a deal to get out from under the hit *forever*. He thinks he has something that will convince the Megasyndicate to go along with it, but he needs novas to help him out.

The story should be as Gonzo and over the top as possible. Dr. Duke Rollo is conscious of being a character in the story of his own life and feels a responsibility to act interestingly at all times. Play it up.

As it turns out, if the characters can arrange a meeting with the nearest ranking syndicate officer, he'll be willing to listen. Rollo's hole card mentioned above is enough to make the mobster consider removing the hit. He will try to use the occasion to get a favor out of the characters — something useful he needs done but doesn't have his own personal team of novas to accomplish. Play this out in whatever manner seems appropriate. The syndicate guy won't push it if the novas aren't amenable.

It shouldn't be too difficult to help Rollo get out of hot water, but the ride should be as interesting and hair-raising as possible. The characters might wonder just how Rollo's survived all these years on his own.

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ABERRANT™ WORLDWIDE



PHASE I: A Worldwide Sourcebook for Aberrant®

ABERRANTTM WORLDWIDE

PHASE I

**...And what rough beast,
its hour come round at last,**

The world is not a static place. It turns; it changes. With the entry of nova influence into the highest positions of world power, the world has undergone a quantum-powered renaissance. Project Utopia has led the world into a new golden age of glamour, heroism and progress. But something is wrong.

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